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April 1, 1884.

Vol. XIV.

Single Number.

PUBLISHED WEEKLY BY BEADLE AND ADAMS,
No. 98 WILLIAM STREET, NEW YORK.

Price,
5 Cents.

No. 349.

WILD WOLF, THE WACO: or, Big-Foot Wallace to the Front.

BY "BUCKSKIN SAM"—Major Sam S. Hall,

AUTHOR OF "OLD ROCKY'S BOYEES," "GIANT GEORGE," ETC., ETC.



"DOWN LIKE A METEOR SHOT THE DESPERATE MAIDEN, HER FEET STRIKING, AND WITH GREAT FORCE, UPON THE SHOULDERS OF THE SAVAGE."

Wild Wolf, the Waco;

OR,
Big-Foot Wallace to the Front.

A TRUE TALE OF TEXAS.

BY "BUCKSKIN SAM,"

(MAJOR SAM S. HALL.)

AUTHOR OF "THE FIGHTING TRIO," "FRIED FRED," "GIANT GEORGE," "OLD ROCKY'S BOYELS," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

GRACE AND BEAUTY.

THE ruddy glow of the sun, now near its setting, illuminates the scene which we propose, in our feeble way, to describe to the reader.

The vast, far-stretching plain between the town of Castroville and the head-waters of Cottonwood creek, a tributary of the Rio Medina, in Texas, is as level as a floor, and covered with rich, verdant grass, mingled with which are flowers of every hue.

To the west, south, and north from the middle of this broad prairie, there is nothing to break the view, the level expanse stretching to the horizon-line; but to the east afar off is a dark-green serpentine line of timber, which marks the course of Cottonwood creek.

The declining sun casts a fiery glow over this magnificent plain; over grass and flowers.

The intense heat which has ruled during the day has somewhat abated, the power of Old Sol being curtailed by the hazy atmosphere of coming eve.

In the middle of the plain, the only moving object on the broad expanse, the only break in the level ocean of grass and flowers, is a medium-sized black horse and its rider. The animal is held by a stiff rein, but is moving nervously and impatiently from side to side, tramping and crushing the grass and flowers.

The horse is headed toward the west, and forced to face that way for the purpose, as is plainly evident, of allowing the rider to view the beautiful sunset. The animal is a superb specimen of the equine family, sleek and glossy, and with long wavy mane and tail; as is also its forelock, which flies wildly below its eyes, as up and down the beast bows its head, evidently eager to gallop with free rein over the prairie.

The sun glistens intermittently on the glossy sides of the black steed; its great eyes, which indicate gentleness and intelligence, also reflecting the farewell rays of the god of day.

Last, but whose description we have impolitely delayed, for the reason that we doubted much our ability to even approach a delineation of her loveliness, is the fair rider—a young girl of perhaps sixteen summers.

Beautiful, indeed, is this fair creature, this lone rider on the vast and spreading prairie of the Lone Star State; although a deep sun-tan has banished the pearl-like natural complexion, and almost hidden the rose-tints upon her cheeks—at least, blending in with the roses are the deeply-imprinted kisses of the southern sun.

Gray, lustrous eyes—"twin-stars of beauty"—shining out, at times shooting piercing glances sweeping the western plain, and then becoming fixed in admiration upon the sun.

Delicately-penciled eyebrows, and lids fringed with dark lashes; a lovely dimple in each glowing cheek, from out which the smothered roses struggled—thus she looked. And, as the lower disk of the sun seemed to touch upon the distant horizon line, an increased look of wonder filled her large gray eyes, blended with admiration. Her lips parted, and displayed a row of glistening and pearly teeth.

Her abundant hair hung, wavy and free, to her waist, and even below it, to the cantle of her saddle; soft and rich, in its dark luxuriance.

Add to the attractions already enumerated, a slim waist, a graceful figure, a bewitchingly sweet expression of countenance, and you have our heroine's description, as near as we can furnish it; if we except a close-fitting costume of grayish homespun, and a flower-wreathed gypsy hat of white straw.

Sitting thus, upon her saddle, Gracie Greene, of Greene's Ranch, on Cottonwood creek, was a bewitching beauty; her position, interest, and admiration of the gorgeous sunset betraying an artistic and poetic nature.

The flash of her eye, and the swan-like motion of her form, as her prancing black half-breed showed its impatience to be off, indicated

a suppleness, which was still more strongly manifested as she turned her horse to the southward, and gave the animal free rein.

At the same time, the maiden gazed eastward, in the direction of the far-off line of timber.

Horse and rider seemed well matched; each showing a grace of movement and a beauty that was remarkable to behold.

On, galloping like the wind, speeds the steed; at times darting from side to side, shaking its head, and tossing its flowing mane, as if greatly rejoiced at being no longer held in check within a limited space.

Then it was, that Gracie Greene proved that she was an accomplished horsewoman, and one who had been long used to the saddle.

At the horn of her saddle was looped a lasso, the noose of which was formed by a small but firm silver ring; and about her waist was a stamped belt, with richly engraved clasp, also of silver, and which sustained a small revolver, and a Spanish dagger.

It has been mentioned that there was no break in the broad and level expanse; and, certainly, there did not appear to be.

Not a tree, or bush, or stone—not even a swell in the surface—but, as Gracie galloped southward she came suddenly upon the brink of a deep *barranca*, which could not have been detected thirty paces from its edge; the grass upon one side blending with that of the other.

That the young girl was aware of the existence and location of this *barranca*, was plainly evident; for she guided her horse a short distance up the same, to the west, soon reaching a point where a steep path led down to its bed.

A difficult and dangerous descent it was; but the maiden with the greatest indifference and unconcern that was possible to manifest, allowed her horse free rein, the sure-footed animal following the winding path in a confident manner, which showed that it was not the first time the beast had, by the same way, gained the bed of the *barranca*.

Upon reaching the bottom of the deep chasm, the steed trotted eagerly forward some fifty yards, to the opposite side of the same. There, at the base of the towering earth wall, was a small pool of water, around which was a carpet of the greenest of grass—an oasis in the barren *barranca* bed.

Gracie Greene sprung lightly to the earth, with a tin cup in her hand; and, grasping the bridle rein near the bit, exclaimed, laughingly:

"Hold, Beauty! Stand right where you are, until I satisfy my own thirst. You are very impolite, I am sure, to seek to plunge into the pool, and muddy the water, before your mistress has had a chance to fill her cup."

"I thought I had taught you better, but it seems you are forgetful. However, I forgive you! It's all my fault anyway, for I have forced you to travel far in the heat, without drink, and we must start toward home soon, for it is getting late."

The horse made not the slightest effort to enter the pool, after being checked; and Gracie, quickly dipping up a cupful of water, stooping over for that purpose, then permitted Beauty to drink to his heart's content.

The sun had now sunk below the horizon, but it cast a lurid glow upward; the same blending with the blue at the zenith.

But it was nearly dark at the bottom of the chasm, and the young girl quickly remounted, with remarkable agility, turned her horse about, and urged the animal to, and up the path; soon regaining the plain.

Not the slightest zephyr now stirred the air, or caused the blades of grass to move.

All was deathly still. The view over the wide plain was solemn and depressing, and the rustle of the grass, beneath the hoofs of Beauty, was a relief to the stillness that ruled the evening on that lone prairie.

Gracie cast a long and lingering look at the golden sky in the west, and then at the moon, just lifting her demolished disk above the line of timber to the eastward, that marked the course of Cottonwood creek; on the bank of which was her home, Greene's Ranch.

Ahead, eastward, it was, when compared to the west, dark; but the maiden seemed in no hurry, allowing Beauty to canter easily along.

Turning in her saddle, she again gazed toward the west, suddenly jerking her horse to a halt, surprise and wonder imprinted upon her fair face; for, exactly in the line of the brightest portion of the west, at the very point at which the sun had sunk below the horizon, was a horseman; clearly outlined, both animal and rider, against the fiery background.

This equestrian was far away, as a matter of

course, and his character or color could not be guessed; and, as desperate and dangerous men frequented the border at the time of which we write—more than a score of years ago—Gracie touched her steed lightly with her whip, and the animal went skimming over the plain, like a grounds-weeping swallow, toward the ranch.

Darker and darker grew the surroundings, but the girl seemed unconscious of this, or else she seemed to have forgotten all that was present.

She appeared to be engaged in deep musings, her eyes bent upon the neck of her horse, and she in listless attitude, as far as was possible, and at the same time maintain her seat in the saddle.

Thus on, mile after mile, the mantle of night falling more dense upon the earth; the golden glory of the sun having disappeared, and the moon showing its curtailed surface but dimly.

Fully five miles intervened between the young girl and the line of timber, which was her objective point, when suddenly she lifted up her bowed head, and gazed toward the creek.

No sooner did Gracie Greene shoot her glance forward than one might have seen, even in the dim moonlight, her face turn ghastly, her eyes start, filled with a terrible dread, and her features contort with horror. At the same instant she jerked her horse to a halt so suddenly that the animal's forefeet pawed the empty air, as he reared upward with a snort of pain and fright.

Then from the lips of Gracie came a cry of apprehension and terror:

"My God! the ranch is on fire! Oh, Heavens! the long-feared danger has arrived! The Apaches are on Cottonwood creek. Father, mother, sisters, brothers—all are doomed! Oh, my God! This is more than I can bear!"

"On, Beauty! The red demons of the plains are burning our home!"

The last words were shrieked out on the night air, in a voice so filled with anguish that it was torturing to hear.

Her whip hissed, a sharp crack followed about the hams of her horse, and Beauty shot like an arrow toward Cottonwood creek, the timber of which, directly ahead of them, was now brightly lit up by lurid, forked flames, presenting a weird spectacle, although the conflagration was on the opposite or east side of the stream, and many trees intervened.

Again and again was Gracie's whip applied, and Beauty flew, with terrific speed and panting heavily, through long grass and flowers.

Never had the horse felt before the sharp and torturing cuts of the whip of his young mistress, and it made him frantic. But the lash still hissed through the air; all else forgotten and repudiated by the agonized girl, except the horrible probabilities that were ahead.

Straight on, her eyes fixed upon the flashing flames, and her features drawn with unspeakable anguish, she dashed madly toward her home.

Then, when hoping and praying that the fire had been accidental, and not kindled by the pirates of the plain, her heart sprung to her throat, as, in murderous exultation, rung the terrible war-whoop of the merciless Apaches, from many throats.

Yet on, more like a corpse than a living being, dashed the horror-stricken maiden; clutching at the mane of her horse for support, and reeling in her saddle—a most pitiable sight to behold!

On, with no fear for herself; only wishing to relieve her bursting brain from this horror, even by death at the hands of the red savages.

On, only thinking of the loved ones, and wishing to die with them. But it was ordered otherwise.

Gracie Greene was not fated to fall into the power of the despoilers of her home, and the slayers of her loved ones; for again the war-whoop sounded, just as Beauty was on the very verge of the undergrowth, and beneath the moss-draped limbs of the timber on the west side of the stream.

The terrific sound caused the horse to wheel so suddenly, that the poor girl was mercifully hurled into the dark shades; and lay there, silent and senseless, as if stricken with death.

Thus startled, the horse, with a snort of frantic terror, dashed at headlong speed on the back trail westward, over the broad, far-stretching plain.

CHAPTER II.

MURDER MOST FOUL.

THE plain on the east side of Cottonwood creek, although apparently as wide and level as on the west, presented a somewhat differ-

ent appearance; being dotted with cattle, mules and horses—the latter two grazing in small herds.

The bottom-timber, on the creek, did not at any point in the vicinity of Green's Ranch, exceed fifty yards in breadth, including each side of the stream. Just within a bend of the creek, on its eastern side, stood a long log structure, common in Texas, with an opening in its center, which allowed free circulation of air. This opening was of the same dimensions as the large rooms of the dwelling on its either side; the same roof covering all, and the same flooring of hewn logs, stretching across the opening, where the dining-table was usually spread.

There, too, on hot nights, the male portion of the family slept; hammocks being frequently hung for the females, in the same cool space.

This dwelling was forty-five feet long and fifteen in width; the rooms at each end being thirteen feet square, as the log walls were two feet in thickness. The roof was covered with long, rough-split shingles, and the windows were provided with oaken shutters.

At either end of this building, and some fifty yards distant, were two large corrals, a huge bake-oven; and some small log structures were in the rear of the house, the latter having a wide veranda in front, which commanded a view of the east plain. This veranda was covered with flowering vines, which climbed up to the roof.

The creek was about twenty yards from the rear of the dwelling, and picturesque clumps of undergrowth had been left unmolested, when the main portion of the same had been cut from between stream and dwellings.

Such was Greene's Ranch, on Cottonwood creek, but a short half-day's ride from the Rio Medina.

George Greene, a man of some fifty years of age, the owner of this ranch, and the father of Gracie, kept but two Mexican herders, whose main duty was to prevent the stock from straying over the stream, on the west plains; over which, at times, war-parties of Indians passed, going around the head of the creek, on their way to raid the rich ranches of the Rio Frio, lower down-country.

"Cap Greene," as he was familiarly known among the rancheros, was a veteran of the Mexican war, who, upon the close of the same, settled in Texas, on the lower portion of the Rio Medina; afterward removing to where we find him, on Cottonwood creek.

The mother of Gracie was an Arkansas lady, of uncommon intelligence and good education; and, but for this fact, the young girl would have been sadly ignorant. For there were no schools, at the time of which we write, except in the larger towns.

Captain Greene, although without a very liberal education himself, furnished his wife and daughter with books, regardless of cost.

There were four children, besides Gracie; two boys and two girls. Our heroine was the eldest, the next in years being a boy, James, or Jimmie, who was fourteen. Then came Fanny, aged twelve, and John and Nelly, aged respectively ten and six.

All were bright, intelligent children, and no more happy family could be found in West Texas; but, as will be seen, their happiness was destined to be transformed to despair and death, and that amid horrors which would scorch and madden the brain of an observer.

About the same time that Gracie urged her horse down into the *barranca*, Captain Greene, with his two herders, spurred from the cattle-dotted plain to the south corral, removed the saddles and bridles from their horses, and allowed them to go free, dragging the neck-ropes, on the verge of the timber.

The Mexicans, Antonio and Pedro, repaired at once to a small cabin in the rear of the house that has been described, and proceeded to cook their evening meal.

Captain Greene, strode at once, over the lawn, stepped across the veranda upon the log flooring of the open space before referred to, and sunk, in a wearied manner into a chair.

A moment after, he held his youngest two children on his knees; they clinging affectionately about his neck, and prattling with merry voices, each striving to gain his attention.

Fanny, who sat reading, arose and embraced her father, and then returned to her chair.

Mrs. Greene welcomed her husband, and, assisted by a negress, spread the table for tea; while the eldest boy was busy in front of the house, plaiting a raw-hide lariat, as he called out to his father, in a cheerful voice, when he saw him ride up.

The latter, after a moment's talk with his pets, suddenly cast a sweeping glance around, and then addressing his wife, asked in a somewhat anxious voice:

"Where's Gracie, mother?"

"She called Beauty, just after you rode away, and galloped up the creek. I feel worried, because she is seldom absent so late, and ought never to be. Gracie is very careless."

"Did she cross the creek?" inquired her father.

"I presume so; for she often rides as far as the *barranca*."

"I must caution her, for there is danger in that direction. I hear that there has been a war-party of Apaches up at the head of the Medina; and the red fiends might come in this direction. I will step across the creek and ascertain if our daughter is in view."

"However, she must be, if she is on the plain."

"Pets, sit here in my chair until I return. Gracie ought to be home at tea-time. She is too venturesome, by far."

"Tea is almost ready, papa," said Fanny, who had laid aside her book to assist her mother.

"You had better take the horn and blow it, if you see Gracie on the plain."

"I reckon I will, Fanny," agreed the captain, taking a large horn from a nail on the log wall, and passing the hut of the Mexican herders, went on toward the timber.

He soon reached the creek, and crossing the same upon a log bridge, entered the dense undergrowth, which grew on the western side of the stream.

So thick were the bushes that he was forced to press the branches and twigs with both hands away in front of him, they flying back with a whisking sound. The difficulties of his passage thus occupied Captain Greene's entire attention.

But a short distance had he proceeded thus, when a half-dozen fierce war-painted Apaches sprung from the thick bushes upon him, clutching his arms, and binding them fast behind him in an instant; uttering low guttural "Ughs," in exultation.

Perhaps there never was a man more dazed, dumfounded, and horrified than the old ranchero.

He was petrified with amazement; this feeling changing to the most torturing concern and anguish, when he thought of his dear ones.

Upon recovering partially from his utter astonishment, which was so overwhelming, Captain Greene strove to give a yell of warning; but a burly brave struck him a powerful blow upon the mouth, causing his lips to be driven over the parted teeth, the blood flowing profusely.

Then realizing that, even did he yell, it would do no good, as his loved ones would naturally suppose him to be signaling Gracie, who was near enough to hear his voice, without using the horn—realizing this, the ranchero did not attempt to repeat it.

The hideous braves paid but little attention to their captive after securing him, all gazing toward the ranch, and listening intently.

This caused the mentally tortured man to decide at once that more of the red demons were in the vicinity, and not long had he to be assured of the fact. For distinctly upon the still evening air broke the twang of bow-strings, followed by the most fearful yells of agony, which the captive knew proceeded from the Mexican herders.

Captain Greene groaned in anguish, and trembled from head to foot.

His brain seemed like molten lead. His skull appeared about to burst with the most poignant anguish and dread concern in regard to his dear ones, who he well knew were doomed to death, either instantaneous, or by terrible torture.

The groans, the anguish-filled, staring eyes, the agony sweat upon the forehead standing in great beads, the quivering muscles, the twitching facial nerves—all told plainly of a torture of mind that was beyond comprehension, and one glance at the poor ranchero would have melted a heart of marble. But these evidences of his sufferings gave intense gratification to his merciless captors, who, as the yells of the ill-starred Mexicans rung through the timber, hurried Captain Greene toward and over the creek.

As they reached the log bridge a sounding and terrible war-whoop rung out, in which the braves joined, dragging their captive faster along.

Then followed piercing shrieks of mortal terror and dread horror from the wife and children, and the sharp crack of a rifle brought a death-yell and other fierce and vengeful howls.

A moment after Captain Greene was secured to a tree near his home in a standing position.

Before him, and not twenty paces distant, hanging heads downward, their ankles bound to the limb of a tree, scalped and mutilated in a horrible manner, were Antonio and Pedro, their agony-contorted faces, glassy eyes, and gashed forms presenting a sight that was fearful to look upon.

Scarcely had he been bound when the horrified ranchero beheld his wife and children being dragged from the dwelling by the painted, exultant fiends in human form—all shrieking with terror.

Then upon a horse, galloping at headlong speed, came his brave boy, James, his face pallid, a desperate look frozen thereon, as he dashed in among the Apaches, who were dragging his mother, sisters and brother from the ranch toward the tree to which he was bound.

The daring youth held in hand his Colt's revolver, and down went a brave at every shot.

Straight up to the tree dashed James Greene, and leaning over, slashed free his father, passing a revolver into the old man's hand.

At the same instant the boy sprung from his horse, and, at his father's side, rushed to defend his mother and the little ones.

So unexpected had been the charge of the youth, and so true to his aim—every brave, whose hand had clutched his loved ones, falling with horrible death-yells—that for a moment the remaining warriors were thunderstruck.

But it was only for a moment.

Then full a score rushed, knives in hand, upon father and son, and also clutching the mother and children, who, upon their first captors falling dead or dying, had run shrieking toward their natural protector.

It was a terrible sight—most terrible!

The brave rush of father and son to meet the mother and children was grand and most heroic, for death, they knew, was in every step they took.

With horrible whoops the infuriated savages bounded forward, father and son, in frantic desperation, firing a fusilade of revolver-shots as they stood between their dear ones and the foe.

Down went three more braves; but right upon the whites sprung the survivors, and the next moment the brave boy fell dead at his mother's feet, a score of terrible knife-stabs in his body.

"God help you, mother! Good-by!"

These were the last words of poor Jimmie, his soulless eyes fixed and frozen upon his mother's face; that mother standing silent over his mangled corpse, a horror and anguish in her glance, and upon her face, which—thank God!—few are called upon to witness.

Clinging to their mother's skirts were the terrified younger children, as the father was once more grasped by red, blood-smeared hands—he, as well as his wife, bereft of speech or action by the fearful death of his noble son.

Terrific, vengeful yells filled the air, and rung and echoed in the timber; a score more of paint-daubed Apaches appearing upon the scene, and galloping at headlong speed upon their half-wild mustangs, amid the lash and hiss of quirts and the snorts of their bounding steeds.

Blood-curdling whoops and yells and howls burst forth afresh, as Captain Greene was again bound to the tree, and his wife and little ones were dragged before him, and their clothing torn from their trembling forms by the warriors, who were frantically furious and murder mad at the death of so many of their comrades.

Mrs. Greene was jerked in front of her helpless and terrified husband, and the scalp slashed from her head, she being held by each arm by a burly brave.

And thus she was forced to stand, crying out in her agony, while the blood ran in streams down her face and neck.

Fanny, John, and little Nelly were then forced between the father and mother, shrieking with dread and horror, and their scalps torn from their heads, amid yells of fiendish glee from the hellish horde.

Surely never was man called upon to witness as torturing horrors as the old ranchero!

Could there be more torture within the gates of Gehenna?

With piercing cries of agony and hopeless horror, scalped and covered with blood, his wife and darlings were forced to stand before him, his brain seething with such intense and overpowering anguish of soul that he appeared more like a corpse than a living being. This was but the beginning, however.

Wild Wolf, the Waco.

Soon shot up lurid flames, to reveal the dread sight more distinctly to the eye of the cruelly-tortured husband and father.

Greene's Ranch was one sheet of flame!

His home was on fire. His dear ones were doomed; were now suffering the tortures of the lost.

There was no hope for any! Death would be a mercy to all!

Thus thought Captain Greene.

Then, as a warrior slashed his knife across the body of Mrs. Greene, and she fell to the earth, and the brains of little Nelly were dashed out against the very tree to which he was secured, the captain gave a shriek that terrified even the red demons, and sunk forward senseless, upheld only by his bonds!

No more could they torture him with the agony of his loved ones; and with yells of fury, and vengeful triumph, they released the scalped children, stepped backward, and then a half-dozen deadly shafts were shot from their bows and plunged to the feather in the vitals of John and Fanny. The butchery was complete!

All of Captain Greene's family except Gracie lay dead and mutilated upon the sward before him; yet he saw them not, for God had in mercy taken his senses from him.

The flames flashed, flared, and roared with hissing and creaking sounds, and around the burning dwelling danced a hideous ring of hellish beings, with painted faces, breasts, and arms!

Danced in spasmodic hop, filling the air with whoop and yell of demoniac glee and exultation!

The once happy home of George Greene was now a mass of flames, his family, with the exception of his eldest daughter, lay stretched, dead and horribly mutilated before the senseless father; but—thank Heaven!—he saw nothing of it.

And far better would it have been for him had his senseless condition merged into its sister, death!

CHAPTER III.

THE SOLITARY HORSEMAN.

THE hellish dance of the hideous Apaches around the burning ranch, and their unconscious captive and the mutilated corpses of their innocent victims, was of short duration; for they feared the flames might attract the notice of some night rider on the plains, who would at once guess at the cause of the conflagration, and alarm the rancheros on the Rio Medina.

A dozen braves had been ordered, at the commencement of the attack, to gallop out over the east plain, and collect as many horses and mules as was possible; and the sound of hundreds of hoofs on the prairie was now a signal for immediate departure.

The dead and wounded braves were bound upon their mustangs, and the plunder of the ranch upon extra animals, that were led for the purpose on the war-trail.

Captain Greene, still senseless, was also secured upon the back of a half-wild steed; but he recovered consciousness before the start—recovered to behold, as in a horrid dream, the awful scene of the dread tragedy!

He could hear the thunder of hoofs, as his affrighted horses and mules were driven down the creek, on a frantic stampede, kept on their course by yelling braves, the snorts of the terrified animals filling the air.

Loud and exultant whoops sounded from the main portion of the war-party, as the immense herd of animals swept past; then they all sprung into their saddles, their quirts hissed, and on like fiends of the night they galloped—the laden animals led by the hindermost of the warriors.

Words are too devoid of meaning to express the feelings of the hapless ranchero, as bound in a torturing manner to the back of the mustang, he was hurried from the spot, so recently his happy home; hurried from the mutilated corpses of his wife and children, who, denied burial, and left for wolves and buzzards, lay in the glare of their burning home!

So terrible was the mental torture endured by the poor man, that his brain became benumbed, and he sunk into a state of hopeless despair. So horrible and appalling had been the dread occurrences of the evening, that even Gracie was for the time forgotten.

Then, after the night air had somewhat cooled his fevered head, as he recalled the fact that Gracie was not at home to meet her death with her mother and the other children, he thanked God that one of his darlings had escaped.

But further thought caused him to fear that Gracie's non-arrival at the ranch was due to these very Apaches. And what then?

Perhaps the inhuman fiends had butchered her on the plain; and, when he reasoned upon this subject, during an interval of semi-calmness that was strange and unnatural, he was prompted to hope that she, too, had been killed.

Should she have escaped, and should she reach the ranch, finding the same burning, and those whom she so loved, dead, gashed, and scalped, her sufferings would be ten times worse than any prolonged torture by the Apaches.

Captain Greene relapsed from one strange state of mind to another; from insane fury to a mad thirst for vengeance, from the most intense horror and dread terror to calm thought and cool reasonings, from a dazed state in which he was incapable of thought to the most abject and hopeless despair, deathly in intensity.

Only an hour previous, he had been at his happy home, with his dear ones about him; the future appearing bright and prosperous, no cares to worry him, and only flattering prospects for his declining years.

Now, his home was destroyed, his dear ones had been brutally murdered, and he, a bound captive to the murderer, was being hurried to a terrible death at the torture stake!

Most certainly this was enough to benumb the brain of any man, and to plunge him into the gloomiest depths of despair.

And on, over the plain, like the rush of a "norther," swept the Apache horde, and the herd of stolen animals; the hoofs flying through the tall grass, the snort of steeds, and the lash of quirts, being the only sounds that broke above the continuous "swish" of hoofs through the snapping grass—the Apaches maintaining perfect silence.

On thus, they rode, for a mile and more, and then the herd was turned into the timber, and driven through it, followed by the war-party all dashing out, and over the west plain, northerly toward the Rio Medina.

Had Gracie Greene known who the horseman was, that she discovered afar over the plain, outlined in the fiery glow of the sunset, she would have whirled beauty about, and galloped westward to join him; knowing that he was speeding toward Cottonwood creek, with the hope of meeting her on the following day.

This equestrian was none other than the lover of the fair girl; a Texan scout and ranger, whose father was a ranchero, on the upper waters of the Rio Medina.

His name was Gerald Granger; and a nobler, braver, more daring young man lived not within the limits of the Lone Star State.

Besides this, he was noted as a most skillful trailer; he being frequently employed as guide and scout, by the Government officers of the military posts of West Texas.

He was handsome, manly, and symmetrically formed; agile, graceful, and full of fire and vim.

Upon a spirited half-breed, a most beautiful animal, black as the wing of a raven, and marked for speed and endurance, he galloped over the plain, aiming to pass around the head of the *barranca*.

He was attired, like all young Texans who resided in that section at this period, in a semi-Mexican costume. This consisted of buckskin breeches, ornamented with buttons, thickly set down each outer seam, and also deeply fringed; the same being sustained by a red silk sash, one long fringed end of which depended at each side.

A blue woolen shirt of fancy make, with wide flowing collar, a black sombrero, with broad brim, and high-topped cavalry boots, into which the legs of his breeches were tucked—these constituted his costume; Mexican spurs being buckled upon his heels.

A brace of Colt's army revolvers and a bowie were carried as side-arms, thrust in scabbards, and looped upon a stamped and embossed belt, with a large silver clasp in front.

Long dark brown hair, hazel eyes, sharp and piercing, a sun-bronzed complexion, a chin and lip that spoke of strength of will and great firmness, a mustache and imperial, which added to his jaunty air—such was the lone horseman, Gerald Granger.

He was one who would at once be recognized as a prairie roamer, even by a "fresh" from the States, who had gained but slight knowledge of the frontiers by reading; his appearance and outfit proving this plainly.

A roll of blankets, and a pair of *maletas*, or saddle-bags were secured neatly to the cantle; as was also a tin quart-cup, and canteen, as well as a carefully coiled lasso, which hung in companionship with the neck-rope, at the saddle-horn.

At the time that Gerald was discovered by Gracie Greene—she not knowing, at that distance, who he was—his eyes were fixed upon the very point on Cottonwood creek, where Greene's Ranch was located; that being his objective point, as his course proved.

Gerald could not see Gracie, as the dusk of eve prevented at that distance; and she could not have distinguished the horseman, had it not been for the ruddy sky, against which both he and the animal were outlined.

Gracie and Gerald had been friends for years, and confessed lovers for some six months; the fair maiden often galloping long distances under his guardianship. She was, although of a naturally refined taste, poetic, and a great admirer of all that is artistic and beautiful; a real typical border maiden, taking pride in what are considered accomplishments on the frontier.

Not only was she a daring rider, but Gerald had taught her to throw the lasso, follow a trail, and shoot a rifle, or revolver; she becoming quite expert at each, and practicing almost daily at one or another.

Both were great admirers of nature; in fact they reveled in the wilds of the bottom-timber, fishing, hunting, and even chasing wild mustangs together. Not on earth was there a happier pair than they, when they were enjoying each other's company: and there was but one cloud in their sky, to cast, at times, a gloom over their young hearts. This was the usual one.

It was a dislike, or antipathy, entertained and expressed by Captain Greene against Gerald; originating from the fact that the latter was wild, and roamed the plains, when he ought—as the old ranchero thought—to remain at home, and assist his father in "running the ranch."

The young man well knew, however, that this was not the real reason of the captain's dislike. The true difficulty was, that the Grangers did not own stock enough to be considered equal in station and wealth to the Greenes.

Not only this, but the old ranchero had his own plans and hopes for his daughter.

He wished to have her marry some man of high standing and wealth.

In consequence of this, the lovers were obliged to meet at times clandestinely, the spring in the *barranca* being their trysting-place on many occasions. This was probably the reason that Gracie visited the same as we have seen; for neither she nor Beauty would have suffered from thirst had they continued on.

Gerald, upon this particular evening, had an object in going to Cottonwood creek.

He intended camping below the south corral and calling the next day, after the old ranchero had gone out upon the plain to inspect his stock; Mrs. Greene being favorably disposed toward the lovers, and always enjoying the young man's company greatly.

Gerald purposed starting, in a day or two, for the Nueces river, on a mustang hunt; and he wished to see Gracie, and inform her of this fact, in order that she might not worry about him, or endanger her life by galloping too far west, with the view of meeting him.

As has been mentioned, the young scout, kept his eyes fixed upon the point on the creek far to the eastward, where Greene's Ranch was located; and consequently, he discovered the flames of the burning building some time before Gracie did.

At first, he was filled with wonder and apprehension, which changed to the utmost concern and anguish; for he decided that the fire was at the ranch, and that it had been kindled by savages. No sooner had he come to this conclusion, than he drove deep his spurs, and sped around the head of the *barranca*, and thence southeast, toward the creek; forcing his horse at full speed, in his agony of suspense.

Full seven miles from the fire was Gerald Granger, when he first perceived it; but his fleet horse lessened the distance in a rapid manner. As he gained a position directly west from the ranch, he discovered Gracie, in much the same way she had, at the first detected him.

This was brought about by the light of the fire; the young girl being in a direct line between him and the blaze.

When Gerald thus perceived her, he drove spurs still deeper, lashing the horse with the end of his lariat, and bending forward in his

saddle, with the utmost amazement and the most torturing apprehension.

That his darling had been to the *barranca*, expressly to gain some intelligence of himself—as he had often left notes there for her when he missed meeting her—Gerald fully believed; and now she was speeding headlong to her home, which was wrapped in flames.

If the ranch had been fired by Indians, the red fiends must still be there, performing their murderous work; and Gracie, agonized beyond reason, would gallop directly into their midst, and be captured—perhaps slain outright!

This caused Gerald to spur on yet faster; he vowing that she should be terribly avenged if injured in the least, and rescued if captured, at the risk of his life.

The world would be dark, and most miserable his lot, were Gracie Greene slain.

This he well knew; indeed he felt that he would prefer death to life without her.

More than four miles had the young man galloped, when he lost sight of the fast flying maiden and her horse; but he knew that she had deviated slightly from a direct course between him and the flames, and consequently could not be seen against the dark timber line.

Not only this; but he felt that she was in the immediate vicinity of the timber, and that a few bounds of her horse would bring her to the ranch.

The anguish of the young man was terrible, when he realized that it was impossible for him to overtake his darling; that, did his fears prove true, she was doomed to death, or a worse fate, at the hands of the red fiends of the Rio Pecos! But he must reach her.

On like the wind he bounded until less than a mile separated him from the timber; when, to his utmost amazement, he discovered, clearly outlined against the lurid flames, a horse galloping toward him at terrific speed.

As it approached, Gerald reeled in his saddle. He recognized the horse as belonging to Gracie.

It was the very animal his darling had been but recently riding. He could distinguish the flying stirrup and bridle-reins. Proof beyond doubt.

But where was Gracie?

There remained no doubt as to the horse, for the animal in its frantic fright, galloped alongside that of the young scout, panting and foam-flecked, revealing the gay saddle and bridle of Gracie Greene, as well as the identity of the beast itself.

A heavy groan burst from Gerald, as he recognized the horse and equipments. At the same time, he jerked his own steed to a halt, and grasped the bridle of Beauty.

At this instant, the wild whoops of the savages, as the latter stampeded the herd along the eastern edge of the timber, reached the young man's ears; piercing his brain like red-hot shafts of steel. Then, with another deep groan, torturing to hear, he drove spurs and flew, like an arrow, toward the line of timber.

That Gracie had dashed into the horde of Indians, been torn from her saddle, and her horse escaped in fright, he had no doubt.

Greene's Ranch was destroyed, and the entire family either murdered, or captured!

As this dread truth became stamped upon his brain, Gerald Granger's eyes fixed themselves on the fiery glow ahead, and his handsome features presented the look of a murderous thirst and determination for revenge.

Around to the front on his belt, he slipped his pistols and bowie, ready for instant use; dropping the bridle-reins of Beauty, and allowing the horse free range. Then he clutched his carbine, and quickly picked off the caps, thrusting fresh ones on the nipples, and revolving the cylinder, to assure himself that the weapon was in good working order.

His first impulse had been to dash up, at once, to the burning ranch; but, upon nearing the timber, he having had time to reason, he jerked his steed to a walk, and advanced with caution, knowing that perhaps the lives of some might depend upon him alone.

If the family had been taken captives, and he should ride up recklessly, and be himself slain or taken, by the Apaches, then all would be doomed; there being not one who could gallop for assistance.

Hence the caution of the young scout.

To his surprise, however, there was not the slightest sound, to indicate the presence of the red foe.

Nothing, except the sound of the flames, met his ear, as he halted on the west bank of the creek.

Slowly he walked his horse through the ford,

and on, around the clumps of undergrowth, fully believing that the Indians had carried the whole family off.

Suddenly his horse stepped clear of the bushes; but, instantly, with a terrified snort, reared upward, and then sprung, in fright, to the left.

Gerald Granger uttered a groan of soul-drawn anguish, and trembled in his saddle, as if stricken with an ague-fit. His staring eyes were fixed, in a gaze of bewildered horror, upon the mutilated corpses of the mother, sisters, and brothers of his darling!

The slaughtered ones lay, gashed and ghastly, before his agonized gaze; rendered more awful, more horrible, by the red light of the flaring flames!

CHAPTER IV.

WILD WOLF.

GERALD GRANGER sprung from his saddle as soon as he recovered from the sickening weakness that had overcome him, upon discovering the gory remains of those for whom he had long held a great and brotherly affection.

Mrs. Greene had been as kind and loving as a mother to him; and now she lay before him, gashed and hacked in a horrible manner, covered with gore, and scalped; the firelight from her burning home playing upon her glassy eyes, and causing the young scout to shudder as he gazed upon them.

The pretty and innocent children, the brave and joyous elder brother of Gracie—all of whom had listened many a time, as he related his adventures on plain and in chaparral—there they lay, beside their mother, mangled and dead!

All gone back to God, together!

Only one keen sweeping glance around the burning ranch, out on the plain, and into the dark shades of the timber, gave Gerald; he then sunk upon his knees, the tears coursing down his cheeks, while from his lips sprung the words, as if doubting all on earth, and in Heaven:

"Oh, my God! Where is thy justice?"

He now decided, upon looking around him, that Gracie, as he had at first concluded, had been torn from her saddle, on dashing through the timber.

There was not the slightest doubt in the mind of the young scout, after his rapid inspection of the surroundings of the burning ranch, in regard to the fate of his darling. Gracie Greene was a captive to the merciless Apaches, as was also her father; for Gerald felt sure that the old ranchero had at that time of the evening, been at his home. Was it better so? Who could say?

An instant's reasoning caused the young man to decide as well, that the trail of the savages could be easily followed; for the sward around the ranch was torn up, and trampled by the mustangs of the Indians, thus proving that there was a large war-party.

Not only this; but a glance over the plain—the moon having become brighter as the haze of evening disappeared—showed herds of cattle running wildly afar off, the scout judging by this, that the Apaches had been on the east prairie, galloping around the horses and mules to secure them, thus frightening the cattle.

If they had stolen a large number, the trail would be all the more easily followed.

The awful grief, at the discovery of the mutilated dead so dear to him, and the belief that his heart's idol was in the power of the pirates of the Pecos—all this well-nigh bereft Gerald Granger of all power of action, even of reason. It was only by a great effort of a naturally strong will, that he kept his senses, to the extent of forming the conclusions we have detailed.

Had he known that the one he loved more than life lay pallid and senseless, on the border of the west line of the timber, but fifty yards from him—had he known that he had galloped within twenty feet of her, his heart would have been filled with the most thankful joy.

But poor Gerald did not know this.

Never was a man placed in a more torturing position, born of grief and anguish for the fate of those not his own flesh and blood.

He felt it his duty to depart at once on the trail, but first he must bury the dead. Yet, if he lingered to inter the corpses of the slain, the lives of the captives might be jeopardized.

A few minutes, time might be life or death to Captain Greene and his daughter. His services were needed by the living, and the dead must be neglected; although it gave the young scout great pain, to leave them thus, to the wolves and buzzards.

Then he felt relieved at the thought, that the blazing ranch, which would doubtless be a smoldering mass through the night, at times shooting up forked flames, would prevent the foul beasts and birds from approaching.

Not only so; but there was good reason to believe that some campers, or night riders, between the Medina and the Frio, would discover the fire, or the glare in the sky from the same, and hasten to investigate the cause of it.

Should any prairie travelers thus find the dead, they would of course bury them.

These very natural and reasonable conclusions were arrived at instantly, before Gerald fell upon his knees, and his brain became somewhat relieved from the awful anguish and grief that benumbed it.

For a moment only the young scout knelt. Then he sprung to his feet, dashing the tears from his eyes. Laying his carbine upon the sward, he raised his clinched hands on high, gazing skyward, as if calling upon the powers above to grant attention to his pleading.

Thus for a moment, his lips quivering, his form swaying, then he became as firm as a rock—a desperate determination in his eyes, and vengeful fury blended with the same—as he cried out, in a firm, deep voice, so strange and unnatural to himself that he gave a visible start.

"God in heaven, bear me! I swear by my hopes of happiness in this world, and in that to come, here over the mutilated remains of these helpless ones, so basely murdered at their happy home—here I swear that I will trail the red demons, who have slain them, and have a terrible revenge!"

"I swear that the husband and father of these slaughtered ones, that the sister and daughter whom I love as I do my soul's peace hereafter, shall be rescued by my hand from the Apache tortures!"

"Sleep and food shall be strangers to Gerald Granger, until he beholds the paint-daubed faces of his foes. Hear, oh, Heaven! And record this, my oath of vengeance!"

As the last word left the lips of the almost insane scout, he lowered his arms and head, gave one glance at the mangled forms, and then seemed to throw off all the depressing and appalling influences of the horrible scene.

Springing upon his horse, he urged the animal out, opposite the burning ranch upon the clear space, the commencement of the far-stretching plain.

Straight toward the east, he rode at a fast walk, bending low to the shoulder of his animal, and gazing at the sward. As he reached the track of the stampede, Gerald turned his horse northward along the line of timber.

Soon he was on the Apache trail—on the trail for his sworn revenge, on the trail to rescue the fair maid and her unfortunate father!

Previous to the discovery of Gracie in the light of the fire of her burning home by Gerald Granger, the horse of the latter had been fresh; and, although he had pressed the beast at terrific speed for seven miles, it needed but a very short rest for the animal to recover its usual wind and vim.

It was a very brief rest that it had at the ranch; but, soon after, when the young scout passed through the timber and over the creek, to the western border of the bottom, he was forced again to make halt. This gave the black steed time to rest, and also to tear considerable of the rich, nutritious grass from the bottom-sward. The halt was necessitated by the young man's having discovered the Apache war-party on the plain, and now traveling toward the northwest.

Did he emerge from the trees to follow the trail, the Apaches would perceive him, and his plans would be frustrated.

Although the delay was terribly torturing to Gerald, yet there was no alternative; and he gazed with wistful eye toward the dark mass of horses and Indians speeding over the broad prairie.

To gain a view of the war party was a very encouraging surprise to the young scout, although he could not detect the presence of the captives.

At once he knew that the destination of the savages was to the Rio Medina, or a point west of his own home; and he reasoned that they would encamp in a secure place within the shades of the Medina timber, some time during the following day.

To follow on the trail before the Apaches got beyond a point from which they could detect his presence would be madness; and most fearful was the anxiety of the young man, to be thus forced to await—the only consolation being

that his noble black horse would be greatly the gainer by the delay.

Back and forth rushed the young scout, ten thousand thoughts darting through his brain; and he feared he was about to go mad. He must, somehow, relieve himself.

He removed the bridle from his steed, and bathed its spurred and swollen flanks with water, which he brought from the creek in his canteen; pouring large quantities of the same over his own fevered head.

As he bent over a small, still cove in the stream to procure water, Gerald caught the reflection of his face in the water—a bar of moonlight shining down upon the point he had selected—and he drew back with an exclamation of amazement, at the ghastly appearance of his face, unable to believe that the haggard features mirrored below him could be really his own.

It was at this very moment, when Gerald was thus startled by the unnatural reflection of his own face in the stream, that the terrible howl of a black wolf, seeming to proceed from a thicket but a few paces from him, caused the young scout to spring to his feet and jerk his revolver.

Although the howl was almost an exact imitation of the most dangerous "loafer" wolf of the plains, and none except an experienced borderman could have detected that the sound did not proceed from the animal mentioned—yet, hardly had the howl died away before Gerald knew that it had been given as a signal from human lips.

The next instant the revolver of the young scout was lowered; for, following the howl, sounded in a guttural tone the ejaculation, in not a little of impatience and surprise:

"Waugh!"

"Thank God!" exclaimed Gerald Granger, his features showing great relief and most extreme joy as he sprung toward the thicket.

"Wild Wolf, come forth! If ever there was a timely coming of a friend, when a friend was needed, it is now.

"The Good Spirit has sent my red brother to Cottonwood creek. Thank Heaven! I have been so fortunate as to halt in the right place to meet you.

"Wild Wolf, Greene's Ranch is burned. Mrs. Greene and all the children, except Gracie, have been murdered. Their scalps hang at Apache belts. Gracie and her father have been carried away captives. I am on the trail, and my heart is relieved to see you."

As Gerald thus spoke, a horseman forced his affrighted steed from around the thicket, and stood revealed.

He was a noble-looking Indian.

Springing to the earth, the red-man grasped the hand of the young scout and pressed it to his breast in token of amity. At the same time his black, keen eyes gazed upon him, expressing the strongest pleasure that an Indian is ever known to show.

The horse was a fine beast, a dark bay in color, with long flowing mane and tail; and evidently an animal that could keep a trail as long as any of its kind, or, if called upon, could fly over the ground with great speed for a great length of time.

Any one accustomed to horses would at once decide the merits of such an animal.

The rider was a superb specimen of his people. He stood six feet in height, straight as a lance-shaft, supple, wiry and muscular. Three eagle-feathers flaunted proudly from his beaded fillet, which partly held in place his long black hair.

Upon his face were the bars and stripes of war, quite fresh, which, to the scout, proved at once that his news was no news to the Indian, and that the latter already knew of the Apache raid.

Naked from the belt that confined his beaded buckskin leggings, and held partly in place the upper portion of his breech-cloth; thus stood Wild Wolf, the Waco chief, and friend of the Texans.

Upon the broad breast of the chief was the representation of a prairie-wolf, done in black pigment, vermillion and white gypsum—the last being used to represent the fangs and teeth, in the wide-open jaws, from which hung the long red tongue.

A revolver and knife at the belt, a short bow, with quiver of arrows at the back, sustained by a beaded strap over the shoulder, a carbine hanging from the horn of his saddle—these made up the arms of the Waco chief, and at the time of which we are speaking, indicated beyond much doubt, his friendship for the whites.

"Wild Wolf is not blind," returned the chief, proudly. "He has seen the red fire of the log-

lodge, and has put on war-paint. Wild Wolf does not lie in his blanket when the war-cries of the Apaches sound in the ears of his white friends.

"Wild Wolf's heart is sad at the words of Hawk Eye. We have not heard the death-yells of our friends, but the death-howl of Apaches shall sound like the sweet songs of birds in our ears. We came too late, but the war-path is open.

"The scalps of our friends shall not hang long on Apache belts. Dove Eye, the squaw of my white brother, shall not die at torture-stake. Wild Wolf has spoken, and his tongue is not forked."

The Waco had, upon first acquaintance, years previous, named Gracie Greene, Dove Eye, while he had dubbed Gerald, Hawk Eye, and Captain Greene, the White Chief.

"Your words give me hope, Wild Wolf; hope where there has been but little. I see now that you know all; but you have not seen the terrible sight at the ranch."

"Wild Wolf no want see. Know what Apache do on war-path. How does Hawk Eye know White Chief and Dove Eye captives? Did Hawk Eye see Apache dogs, and his rifle not sound?"

"No, I was not a witness to the massacre, or I would not be here now. But I have seen the gashed and scalped corpses of Mrs. Greene and the four younger children. Captain Greene and Gracie are not there, so they must be captives to the Apaches.

"I rode in from the west plain after sunset. Then I saw Gracie galloping to the ranch when it was burning. Her horse stampeded on the back trail without her. She must have dashed in among them in her insane horror, and was captured.

"There is no doubt in my mind that she and her father are now being carried to torture, and she to a worse fate. Again I say, thank God you have arrived at this time of all times.

"Let us gallop at once to the rescue!"

"Good talk. Hawk Eye jump in saddle. Come! War-path is open. War-cry on Wild Wolf's lips.

"It is good. Come!"

In two minutes more the Waco chief and Gerald Granger were speeding over the plain on the Apache trail.

Murder and desolation were in their rear, and in their front—who could say?

CHAPTER V.

WHERE IGNORANCE WAS BLISS.

It was but a few minutes after Gracie Greene was hurled into the undergrowth, that Gerald Granger passed the very spot where she lay senseless, on his way to the burning ranch, fifty yards beyond.

The young scout did not linger in the vicinity of the slain, but a very short time; in fact, it was not half an hour after clutching the bridles of Beauty on the plain, that both he and Wild Wolf were speeding on the Apache trail.

About the time that Gerald was swearing vengeance over the mutilated bodies at the ranch, poor Gracie lay in the thicket, moaning and sighing, just recovering her consciousness; and, as the young man sped along the line of timber, after his discovery of the trail of the stampeding mules and horses, the maiden sprung to a sitting posture, and gazed around her in the utmost bewilderment.

In her fall, her head had struck a sapling, which stunned her for a time: in addition to which, her brain had received a terrible shock when the horrible war-whoops of the Apaches had rung through the timber. But the suffering she had undergone was as a summer zephyr to a raging tornado, compared with that which was to come.

Had it been daylight, and Gerald less agonized, he would, had he examined the "sign" surrounding the ranch and at the ford, have discovered that Beauty had not been on the east side of the creek, while the Apaches were there, as the horse of Gracie was shod. Had he made this discovery, and found his loved one after he had been at the ranch, he would then, in some manner, have prevented her from viewing the fearful spectacle, that would sear her brain with an anguish beyond comprehension—the sight of her butchered mother, sisters, and brothers!

A cruel and merciless fate, however, decreed this otherwise, and doomed the poor girl to experience the excruciating agony of mind, which her father had suffered, and which she was less able to bear.

For a moment, the maiden sat, incapable of reason or action; a most strange feeling op-

pressing her, both mentally and physically. But the shock, which had caused her to be thus, returned with most startling vividness, causing her to regain her reasoning capacities almost on the instant.

This was caused by the forked flames of the ranch flaring upward, as some logs fell inward upon the vast bed of living coals of fire; the red light from the same shooting outward and upward, and casting a glow between the tops of the undergrowth, and the lower limbs of the trees, far out over the plain.

Quickly Gracie turned her head, and then, like a seething avalanche of molten metal, upon the poor girl's brain, all the horrible probabilities of the near past came upon her. She sprung to her feet, catching at the bushes for support, her sylph-like form swaying and trembling, her beautiful features contorted with the most fearful anguish and horror, while her eyes were fixed in terrible apprehension as if expecting each instant to have the awful war-hoops of the Apaches cut through her tortured brain.

But naught, except the but faintly-heard snapping of burning wood, broke the awful silence. The horrified girl stood thus for some time, unable to move a limb; her lips parted and parched with the fever of anguish, and her breathing scarcely perceptible.

Then, behind her, from the plain, came the sound of a galloping horse, the animal coming directly toward her; yet a fascination, which she could not combat, held her in the same position. Thus she gazed at the ruddy glow, through the timber, that marked the position of her burning home, lighting up brightly its near surroundings, which the poor girl longed so much to examine, yet dreaded even to approach.

Had the steed, now so near her, a red brave upon its back, been galloping up, and a batchet about to be buried in her brain, Gracie could not have turned.

She was frozen in her tracks. The same horrible fascination continued to rule her mind.

Thus she stood, her very hair seeming to crawl, as the horse crashed up to her. Then, as the poor maiden's brain reeled, and she was about to faint with the dread of this new and unknown danger, which broke the fascination that chained her—then, the warm muzzle of Beauty pressed her cheek, and a whinny of pleasure and recognition from her pet filled her ears.

With a cry of joy and relief, Gracie clasped her arms about the neck of her horse, and burst into tears, which relieved her almost bursting brain. But a short time, however, did she thus caress her favorite steed. She felt that she must know the dread truths that were screened by the timber, or she must go mad.

From the prolonged silence she felt assured that the savages had departed, and, with one arm about the neck of her horse, she proceeded toward the more open portion of the undergrowth, to gain the bridge over the creek. Her equine companion seemed to understand what was required of him, notwithstanding his previous fright, and the fact that he had galloped about the plain until he was panting laboriously, and flecked with foam.

Beauty snuffed the air, tossed his head, and snorted at the bank of the creek, as if scenting danger ahead; and his fair owner was forced to clutch at his mane instead of clasping her arm about his neck.

So weak was Gracie that she could not mount and she tottered over the bridge, allowing her horse to wade the creek. This he did with hesitancy, snuffing the air, and his eyes protruding from the sockets in dread terror.

As Gracie reached the opposite bank, she realized that she must proceed alone; that her pet was so terrified that he might at any time, were she near him, spring upon her, and do her an injury.

The same suspicion that had been entertained by Gerald in regard to the probability of an Apache spy, or spies, being in the vicinity, entered her mind, causing her to keep within the border of bushes, in the same course that he had taken.

As the young girl now staggered onward, nearing her blazing home, but a few paces from the "open" in which the dwelling had been erected, she became so much agitated that she sunk back, sick and faint, to her knees, and was unable for some moments to proceed further.

And no wonder was it that poor Gracie was thus affected, for the air she breathed was filled with the scent of blood—human blood—the blood of those who had been her darlings, the nearest and dearest to her on earth!

It would have been a mercy had God then bereft Gracie Greene of all sense—yes, even had He stricken her with death, rather than she should suffer ten thousand deaths, and yet live on!

For a moment the unhappy girl, horrified by she knew not what, remained upon her hands and knees in the same spot, and peering through the bushes at the burning cabin.

The silence that ruled around was very impressive and awful to that lone maiden, as she recalled the joyous songs and boyish shouts of merry laughter that had rung through the arches of the timber, day after day, for years.

Awe-inspiring was this silence; death-like, but for the slight noises caused by the blazing logs.

Gracie trembled, aspen-like, for a moment, crawled forward a short distance, then caught at the bushes that bordered the bend, and which were but to her shoulders. Thus she gained an upright position, and stared at the conflagration, which blinded her sight as far as any other object was concerned.

Stepping clear of the bushes, yet still retaining a hold upon them with one hand, Gracie closed her eyes for a moment. Then, shading them with her disengaged palm from the blaze and glare, she glanced along the sward between her position and the now nearly consumed dwelling.

The scene and sound that followed would have caused a disinterested observer—did he or she possess any heart or feeling—the most poignant agony of soul and deepest sympathy; for there, within five paces of the poor girl, stretched upon the ground amid pools of gore, were here darling mother and her loved little sisters and brothers, all scalped and mutilated!

A sight that would have congealed the blood of an observer, even had he never known these victims of the fiendish Apache butchers!

For one brief moment Gracie Greene stood as if transformed to marble; her eyes starting from their sockets in unspeakable horror. Then she threw her arms in the air, and from her lips came a cry so full of harrowing anguish and despair that one would have supposed her life had gone out with that unearthly sound.

The next instant she fell prone upon the sward, as devoid of sense as the slain before her!

And Beauty, quivering in every limb, advanced slowly, oft bounding backward with snorts of terror at the scent of blood; only again to advance his head, at times high in air, and then close to the sward, snuffing suspiciously, and darting glances around on every side. Thus, on came the equine pet of the senseless maiden; nearing, but slowly, the point where she lay, his strong affection for his young mistress counteracting the terror caused by the blazing dwelling, the scent of blood, and the fearful sight of the gory slain.

A stranger and more horrible scene could not well be imagined. The red light played over all, and arched the wide, far-stretching plain to the east, and the towering, moss-draped trees to the west.

And, poor Gracie! There she lay, mercifully senseless for the time.

Heaven strengthen her and pity her, when again her eyes open with the light of reason in their depths; or else, in mercy, take her beyond and away from these horrors, ere again she gazes upon her dear ones as they are!

"God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb." May He enable his fair child to bear up, under her great and soul-torturing bereavement.

But we draw a curtain over this horrible scene; a counterpart of which has oft been beheld by many bordermen.

CHAPTER VI.

A MINISTERING ANGEL.

LONG lay Gracie Greene, as one dead, Beauty standing by her side, at times thrusting his muzzle downward, and rubbing his nose very carefully over her cheek and hands, snuffing at her prostrate form, and then jerking his head upward, and darting keen glances around the dark shades, and at the fire. The horse often started with fright, when a forked flame shot higher than usual, as a log fell down, throwing out showers of sparks.

So appalling and heart-rending had been the sight that had bereft Gracie of all sense, that not one thought of her father had entered her mind. Indeed, there was no time for thought; and, besides, her brain was incapable of action, so great had been the shock, although she had been somewhat prepared for it.

Long she lay as described; but, at length, groaning heavily, she tossed her arms in the

air, as if warding off some terrible danger, and Beauty began to neigh, with evident delight at her awaking.

Soon the poor girl arose to a sitting position, a look of horror frozen upon her pale face, her staring eyes glassy and unnatural in expression; but there appeared to be a settled look of despair, mingled with these plainly-marked expressions, which added to her almost insane appearance. Struggling to her feet, the terribly bereaved girl staggered to the side of her dead mother, and falling upon her knees, kissed the cold brow and lips. Then she embraced, in like manner, the corpses of the children.

It would have been torture for any civilized being to have witnessed this sad spectacle.

Again she started up, and stood, with her eyes fixed upon the heavens, and her hair falling low over her form, and shielding her shoulders, and the greater portion of her arms from view.

She strove to speak; but the prayerful words died on her lips. Naught but choking gasps proceeded from them. Again she attempted it, and this time successfully; but the words were so low, and sounded so strangely, that Beauty started, as if frightened afresh.

"Father in heaven! Why hast Thou thus stricken me? Pity me! Take me home also, and let me be at peace! This is more than I can bear!"

In one way, the words were answered in pity. The overtaxed brain of the poor girl was relieved by a flood of tears; this, probably, being all that prevented her from going hopelessly insane.

Stepping to the side of her horse, Gracie again wound her arms about the animal's neck. To her it seemed that all she loved on earth, were either slain, or had deserted her, except her faithful steed.

As the maiden thus stood, Beauty all at once gave out a snort of alarm, pricking his ears forward, and listening to sounds which he detected toward the north on the border of the timber.

These sounds were the rapid, dull, clattering tramp of a horse, galloping over the grassy plain, and growing each instant more audible; but the weeping girl heard them not.

Nearer and nearer came the strange steed, soon dashing, with bounds of fright, around the blazing dwelling, and directly before the slain.

The animal had, however, been forced to this approach, against its will, by a skillfully jerked jaw-strap, and the not very gentle application of a dexterously-used quirt; the hiss of which drew the attention of Gracie more than the dull sound of the horse's hoofs.

The sight, which now met the tear-dimmed eyes of the poor girl, was one that filled her with as much of thankfulness as she was, at that time, capable of entertaining; but she was again blinded by the copious flood of tears, and resumed her attitude by the side of Beauty.

The new-comer, upon this strange and horrible scene, was a most beautiful Indian woman, who did not appear to be more than a year older than Gracie.

She was attired in a suit of fawn-skin; the same being highly ornamented with beads, tiny shells, and silver trinkets, besides being richly fringed.

A short-skirted dress and leggins made up her costume; her feet being incased in shapely, beaded moccasins. Her hair was long, and dark as a moonless midnight. Her keen and flashing eyes were the same hue, and roses struggled upon her cheeks with the tan of the sun upon her bronzed skin.

Ornaments were also in the meshes of her hair, which hung to the back of her mustang; and, in the middle of the beaded fillet over her brow, was a large fire-pointed star, the emblem of Texas.

This attractive squaw rode astride, in a most graceful manner, and carried, at her belt, a silver-mounted Colt's navy revolver, and a scalping-knife; while, hanging at her back, was a short bow, and a quiver of arrows. Lasso, blankets, gourd, and buckskin saddle-bags, were all secured to her saddle; proving that she was prepared for prairie travel, and for camping out as well.

One lightning-like glance at the scene of the massacre, and then at Gracie and Beauty, the Indian woman shot from her dark eyes as she came upon the scene, and halted her mustang.

Then, as the anguished face of the maiden met her view, as the fair sufferer raised her head from the neck of her horse, the squaw sprung to the sward, led her animal to the border of the timber, and secured the jaw-strap to a

drooping limb; the mustang rearing and snorting in a frantic manner, at the scent of blood, the fire, and the slain.

Heeding not the fright of her steed, the squaw strode, with the grace of a prairie fawn, to the side of our heroine, and clasping Gracie's hand, pressed the palm to her breast.

There was a manner and expression, a look in the eye of the fair savage, that is but seldom seen in any of her stoical race.

It was evident that she had been greatly impressed by everything in the sad surroundings.

The sobs of the young girl became more violent at this expression of sympathy from one, who, it was evident, was no stranger, although of the race by whom she had been so terribly bereaved.

"The Good Spirit has sent Warnona to Dove Eye," said the squaw, in a low, soft voice. "Wild Wolf is not here. He rode to hunt the deer, but he came not back to our lodge on Medina. Warnona ride to meet her chief, but she see him not.

"She see big fire. She know it ranch of Dove Eye. Her quirt fly fast. She is here, and her heart is sad.

"The Apache war-whoop has sounded on the creek. The scalps of my white friends are at their belts. Warnona is not a warrior, but she put on war-paint. She will follow Apache trail.

"Come. Dove Eye will go with Warnona. The death-yells of Apaches shall sound like sweet music in her ears. The scalps of my white friends shall not hang on Apache belts. Wild Wolf will see fire. He will follow trail. Find Dove Eye. Find Warnona.

"Ali sound war-cry. Then save White Chief. He is not here. Apaches take him to torture.

"Where Hawk Eye? He great warrior. Must fight for squaw. Blood of Dove Eye's mother, blood of brothers, blood of sisters call for vengeance.

"Warnona's words good. What say my white sister?"

The form of poor Gracie was convulsed with spasmodic sobs, as the young squaw of Wild Wolf spoke; and not until the name of White Chief was mentioned, did she remove her head from the neck of Beauty. She was now filled with self-condemnation, at not having thought of her father, now her only living relative; though, for all she knew, he too might now be dead.

The probability, however, of his being in the power of the Apaches, as Warnona asserted, caused the young girl's feelings and emotions to change somewhat; and very providential was this. The advent of the Indian woman was a heaven-sent blessing, without doubt; and that, in more ways than one.

The squaw had also spoken of Hawk Eye, or Gerald Granger, the lover, who had also been, for the time, forgotten. If he would but come to her now, in this hour of deepest affliction, it would, Gracie thought, be a great consolation.

If her father had been captured—which she could not doubt—he would be put to the torture.

The poor girl shuddered at the thought that, in all probability, her father had witnessed the massacre of his wife and children!

This was most horrible. It was more than she had been called upon to suffer; and most poignant pity and anxiety for her surviving parent, crowded in amid her terrible agony of soul.

Wild Wolf was out on a hunt, and would doubtless discover the glow of the flames.

Perhaps Gerald would also see the fire, and hasten to Cottonwood creek.

If so, both would not only follow the trail for revenge, and to rescue her father; but they would give the alarm to the neighboring rancheros.

At first the proposal of Warnona seemed absurd.

What could they, two women, do toward rescuing a captive from an Apache war-party?

They would be slain, or perchance captured.

However, the half-demented maiden, as Warnona ceased speaking, became desperate, and resolved that she would attempt to rescue her father, repudiating all her fear and feminine weakness.

Surely, if Warnona would go on the trail, when the latter had no object except to prove her friendship, she, whose father was in the power of the demons of the Rio Pecos, should not hesitate.

She was, thanks to Gerald, a good shot, not an unskilled lassoist, and could pick out a trail.

These thoughts flashed through the mind of the bereaved maiden; but she was destined to have cause to strengthen her resolution, and

eagerness to follow the Apache trail, for Warnona, noticing that the maiden seemed to hesitate, quickly left her to think upon what she had said to her.

The squaw now grasped a bar of cedar, that leaned against a tree, approaching the cabin of the *vaqueros* to obtain it. Not until then, did she discover the mutilated bodies of Antonio and Pedro, hanging from the limo.

With a half-suppressed "Waugh" of surprise and vengeful fury, the squaw returned, and thrust the dry bar of cedar into the red coals. It soon ignited, giving a clear, bright blaze.

Warnona was resolved that Gracie should not be horrified by the sight of the two dead Mexicans; rightly concluding that the poor girl had as much upon her mind as she could bear, and live through it with her senses.

Very cunning and intelligent was the squaw. She knew that Gracie must be led to think upon some other subject than the fearful massacre, or at least to have some anxiety for the safety of the living to prevent her from becoming insane, through grief for the dead.

She had no means of knowing what had become of Captain Greene; but she had asserted her belief as to his capture, for the purpose of causing some change in the maiden's feelings.

Her object in procuring the torch was to endeavor to ascertain, by the "sign," something in regard to the attack and also the force of the war party.

However, Warnona had not gone ten paces, when she made a most important discovery, by which she hoped to influence Gracie more strongly in favor of following the trail.

She well knew that the iron-shod hoof-prints, which she discovered, had been made since the Apaches left the ranch; but she determined to deceive the young girl, in this respect.

These hoof-prints, Warnona knew had been made by the horse of Gerald Granger, and that the young scout was already on the trail. He was, doubtless, alone; which was the greater reason why they should follow, and assist him.

Casting aside her torch, the squaw at once formed her little stratagem.

Taking the bridle-rein of Beauty in one hand and the palm of Gracie in the other, she led the maiden and her horse into the nearest thicket, saying, in a soft voice.

"Dove Eyes stay here. Warnona will roll her white friends in blankets, and then lay in little log lodge. No time to put in ground now."

"Shut door. Then wolves no get in. Buzzards no get in. Mebbe so rancheros be here when sun come. Leave talk-paper on door. Say put in ground, then come on trail. Dove Eye no talk. When Warnona come back, she talk."

Without waiting for a reply, the squaw hastened to the cabin of the herders, which had escaped destruction from its being hidden by a thicket.

In the loft of this cabin, she found several blankets, which she carried to the place where the dead lay. Quickly she rolled each corpse into a blanket, and in her strong arms, bore them to the cabin, one after the other.

When this was done, Warnona cut down the bodies of Pedro and Antonio, and dragged them into the hut also. She then closed the door, placing a huge log against it.

Washing the blood-stains from her hands at the creek, the squaw returned to the side of Gracie; who, seated in the thicket, had relapsed into a despairing mood, weeping convulsively. She knew that Warnona was bearing all that remained of her loved ones to the cabin.

"Wipe eyes," ordered the squaw. "Warnona tell Dove Eye make talk when come back. It is good. Warnona eyes sharp. Iron on hoofs of horse. Warnona know trail. Wild Wolf, he know trail of Hawk Eye."

"Oh, Heaven! This is too much!" cried the poor girl, in accents of despair and suffering. "Surely God will not allow every one to be thus taken from me, leaving me thus desolate, the little time that remains to me on earth!"

"Are you not mistaken, Warnona?"

"Warnona got sharp eye. See Hawk Eye trail. Mebbe so Apache got him. Tie White Chief to torture stake. Tie Hawk Eye to torture stake, if Dove Eye no go with Warnona. Come!"

"We save. We go on trail. War-path open. No warriors. Squaws go on war-path. It is good!"

"Look! Dove Eye put on buckskin. Warnona paint Dove Eye face. Look like Waco brave!"

The squaw, as she spoke, threw down a suit of apparel, almost precisely like that which she

herself wore, together with moccasins, which she had procured from her saddle-bags.

Without hesitation, Gracie threw off her skirts, and soon was attired exactly like her red friend; the latter proceeding to paint her face, neck and hands, a reddish color. She then daubed on the stripes of war, peculiar to her tribe.

The maiden buckled her belt of weapons around her waist, her rifle being strapped to her saddle still, as when she rode upon the plain.

All this was done mechanically.

Warnona unloosed her mustang, sprung upon the animal, and swinging her quirt in the air—after ordering Gracie to follow her example—lashed her steed, which bounded out from the smoking ruins of the ranch.

In a minute more the two war-painted female braves were speeding along the broad moonlit trail, up toward the north, and parallel with the timber of Cottonwood creek, leaving the blazing ranch and the corpses of the slain behind them. The brain of the bereaved girl had become more natural, from the fact that she believed she was now speeding toward her father and Gerald Granger.

While in the thicket, as Warnona had directed, Gracie had written with a pencil, upon a piece of paper which she found in her pocket, as follows:

"My mother, my sisters and brothers are all murdered! Their bodies are in this cabin. Please bury them. Warnona, the squaw of Wild Wolf, and myself now start on the trail of the Apaches, who have done this horrible deed.

"They have now my father and Gerald Granger in their power. For God's sake, follow, and save us and them.

"GRACE GREENE."

This slip of paper was fastened by Warnona to the door of the little cabin, which now served as the receiving tomb of the butchered inmates of Greene's Ranch.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PIRATES OF THE PECOS.

THE general course of the Rio Medina, as it passes through Bexar county, is due east, but its crooks and turns are many.

From the Bandera Hills to Castroville—a small ranchero town at the time of which we write—the Medina flowed almost at right angles with its course below: that is, nearly south.

The Apache war-party were aware that they were in a very dangerous locality; that they must pass between Castroville and San Antonio or else to the south of Castroville, over the vast plains to the Rio Frio.

The burning of Greene's Ranch was a reckless feat, for the blaze could be seen for a long distance. But this very fact would enable them to run the gantlet of the ranches on the Medina.

However, the Apache chief, Black Wolf, rejoiced at securing such a large herd of horses and mules, besides several scalps and a captive for torture, became, as he sped over the plains, resolved to leave a reminder of his presence on the river.

Much elated with his success, Black Wolf decided to increase the herd and secure more scalps. He would then fly with his braves in a direct course, west to the Medina. Agreeably to this pre-arranged programme of the Apache chief, the herd was, with the captive and the slain braves, reduced in their speed to a slow trot, as the dark line of timber appeared in front of them; and under control of a dozen braves, were left to bring up the rear, instead of being in the lead, while the main portion of the war-party dashed on toward the Rio Medina.

It was but a short distance from this point that they had passed, going south, the previous night, when they had halted between two ranches, and spies had been sent out to ascertain the position and surroundings of the one which would be the most favorable to attack on their return.

This manner of proceeding was often practiced by the cunning Apaches and Comanches.

But to explain:

It will be seen at once that, if the trail had been discovered in the morning or during the day after the Apaches had passed south across the Medina to Cottonwood creek, and then followed, the Indians, who secreted themselves within the timber of the creek during the day, could observe the approach of the trailers on the plain—themselves concealed—and lie in ambush to receive them.

Again, did trailers reach the creek after the

departure of the Apaches up the stream to attack Greene's Ranch, the Indians would, by a short delay at the ranch, avoid them. This they could do by doubling on their former trail or proceeding parallel with the same, at a reasonable distance, and thus escape any strong force which might be in pursuit.

Another advantage in favor of the Apaches would be the fact that, had their trail of the previous night been discovered on the Medina, leading south, the people of the ranch they proposed to attack would be taken completely by surprise, as they would not suppose the Apaches would dare return on the east side of Castroville, after passing down-country in that way. All this had been considered.

No attempts had been made by the Apaches, when passing down-country, to avoid leaving "sign"; just the opposite, for a broad trail had been purposely left for reasons that have been explained.

By this proceeding many a war-party has pounced upon a line of ranches, where none were at home except the women and children; the men being thus led from their homes on the trail of the same party of marauding savages.

The Apaches were now riding on like demons of darkness, the sounds made by their advance being audible but a short distance away.

But as they neared the dense shades, jaw-straps were jerked, and the hideous horde of midnight murderers made ready for the attack. This, by Black Wolf's orders, to the fiendish joy of his braves, was to be an open, thunderous, headlong charge, with war-whoops unlimited.

Elated with success, the chief scorned to act in the sly and secret manner usual with him.

He scorned the hated Texans and despised them, although hundreds of miles stretched between them and their villages beyond the Rio Pecos.

The guard with the herd, the plunder, and captive were ordered to pass from the trail of the war-party, southward, fording the river, and then to pass west toward the Bandera Hills, to strike the Medina again, near the same.

Thus the main body were in no way impeded.

Soon the pirates of the plains all disappeared beneath the dark shades of the timber, which was silent as death, and became lost in the mazes of the dense undergrowth.

But a very short time elapsed when the Apache horde emerged from the west side of a belt of timber quite near a ranch which was within a curve of the stream, amid a cluster of huge corrals. These proved the owner to be a man of means.

All was silent around the doomed Texan home, as the Apaches collected in a mass, and then sat their mustangs, awaiting the signal of attack.

For a moment the red fiends sat their impatient mustangs in exultant anticipation, each with arrow fitted to bow-string, and with other deadly shafts ready to adjust and send through the air on errands of death.

Upon the wide veranda which fronted west lay many dark objects, the length and size of men. This was a joyful sight to the Apaches; for they decided, and correctly, that their trail in passing down-country had been discovered, but too late in the day to be followed.

The rancheros of the vicinity had gathered at this ranch, and intended to start on the trail in the morning; none dreaming of the return of the war-party on the east side of Castroville. Had they done so, they would have posted a guard, and an alarm would have sounded immediately.

Thus the Apaches reasoned; Black Wolf being almost wild with exultant joy, as he sprung from his mustang, and gave a number of rapid gestures.

Instantly half of the warriors dismounted, then stole, crouching like demons, spreading out in a line in front of the dwelling. Black Wolf stood erect, his scalping-knife in hand, and made a peculiar sign with it. At once the bow of every brave was bent, the feathered ends of the deadly shafts kissing the painted cheeks of the red fiends. Then, from the chief, rung his wild war-whoop, as a signal to his braves, and a warning to his hated foes.

As the first portion of the prolonged whoop of war burst from the chief's lips, every Texan—fully a score in number—sprung to a sitting posture and clutched his rifle.

Then the twang of bow-strings sounded on the air, and a volley of steel-pointed shafts glinted and glittered in the glow of the smoldering camp-fires, opposite the dwelling.

A pandemonium in sights and sounds followed.

The terrible war-whoops of the dismounted braves, who sent another, and another volley of arrows to the veranda, was echoed by the whoops of their comrades, who dashed in a thunderous charge on their mustangs, toward the ranch. These sounds half-drowned the cries of agony and despair from the Texans, who lay writhing upon the veranda, with the terrible arrows in their vitals.

But a few rifle-shots rang out; then a rattling of revolvers, as some who had so recently been sleeping in fancied security, rushed into the ranch, closing and barring the huge door—forced to leave their wounded comrades behind, to the mercy of those who knew no pity.

Death-yells rang out, as the leaden messengers of desolation from the Texan rifles and revolvers tore through the bronzed breasts of a number of the Apaches. Signal-yells sounded from the chief, and then the dismounted braves bounded forward, knives in hand, springing upon the veranda. It was a scene of carnage.

Shrieks rang, that would have curdled the blood of civilized beings, as the scalps were slashed and torn from the heads of the wounded and the dead. The sharp crack of rifles from the loop-holes of the ranch brought yells, in turn, from the merciless torturers.

The mounted braves quickly surrounded the dwelling, and fired it in several places.

Then it was, as the stifling smoke filled the structure and hung over it like a cloud, that the prayers and outcries of women and children added to the horrors of the scene.

The flames caught the cedar shingles, and burst into one wild, glaring sheet of fire.

Then the door of the ranch was thrown open. Death battling with the red foe was far preferable to one in the midst of flame and smoke.

The doomed Texans, but six in number, with as many children, and two women, emerged from the door, just escaping the terrible flames; but only to behold the triumphant, blood-reeking fiends, in a wide half-circle opposite them. An outer ring of warriors seated upon their mustangs showed that there was no hope.

They had escaped death in one dread form only to rush upon it in another.

At once the rifles of the desperate Texans belched out fire and lead; but at the same time a volley of arrows hurtled through the doomed whites, followed by a rush of savages, who with demoniac whoops of exultation and thirst for blood, sprung in a mad rush upon the horrified rancheros, as the latter attempted to fire their revolvers.

The next moment men, women and children were being dragged from the veranda, and over the hard, smooth ground, amid terrific yells which drowned their shrieks and prayers for mercy.

Then followed the sickening crunch of tomahawk, or war-club, through the skulls, the grating of knives through flesh and bone, followed by shrieks of agony, despair and horror, as scalps were torn from the heads of the victims.

All this fiendish work occupied but a few moments. Then as the conflagration reached its height, the blood-smeared horde of hellish Apaches, with reeking scalps at their belts, sped westward over the plain, the fire enabling them to detect the position of herds of horses, many of which they stampeded into the main herd that had been stolen on Cottonwood creek.

Away went the pirates of the Pecos, with six more slain warriors bound to their mustangs; but their belts were heavy with scalps.

Away through the night toward the Bandera Hills, aiming to strike the Medina east of the same.

And Bill Brown's Ranch blazed high, illuminating the previously dark moss-draped shades in its rear, and revealing in front of it the horribly mutilated forms of a score of hardy Texans, and the women and children.

It was a sight that would have caused a peace commissioner to go on the war-path, and swear that he would show no mercy to red foe, regardless of age or sex.

And the firelight played upon the pools of blood—innocent blood that called for vengeance dire and complete—the flames shooting high, and casting a ruddy glow afar, even beyond the timber to the eastward, thus serving to guide Wild Wolf and Gerald Granger in a true course, and beyond them, Warnona and Gracie Greene as well.

CHAPTER VIII. BIG FOOT WALLACE.

WILD WOLF, the Waco, and Gerald Granger sped over the plain, toward the Rio Medina, as soon as they could do so without danger of

being observed by any of the Apache braves of the war-party, who might gaze back on their trail, for the purpose of ascertaining if they were being pursued.

The Waco chief cared not for the trail. He was making calculations in his mind, in regard to the point at which his foes would cross the river.

The Apaches could not deceive the Waco.

Full well he knew that the red raiders had left a broad trail purposely, when on their way to Cottonwood creek, to draw the rancheros from the Medina; thus leaving their homes defenseless.

Had this not been so, the chief reasoned that Greene's Ranch would not have been fired, and the Apaches would have driven their stolen horses and mules toward the Rio Frio, thence up that stream to the villages, and there have secreted themselves in the dense timber.

Neither the young scout nor his red pard spoke a word, each gazing over the plain ahead of them, and both plunged deeply in thought.

The anguish of Gerald, in regard to the massacre of the Greenes, and the capture of Gracie, as he believed, and her father, was most poignant; yet he was not altogether hopeless of effecting their release. He well knew that there would be more chances for rescuing the captives, by a few persons, than by many; but, most certainly there ought to be more than himself and Wild Wolf, to make the attempt.

The young scout dared not dwell upon thoughts of the agony and terror, with which Gracie had been so suddenly overwhelmed; for he feared that his brain would become demoralized, and unfit him for the perilous and difficult attempt to save her from a worse fate than death, and her bereaved father from torture.

But when he thought of the fearful spectacle, that had met his eye at the ranch, he could not, without a strong effort of the will, repress a yell, to give vent to his mad desire to slay the fiendish murderers of those whom he loved.

Thus, on the two swept over the but dimly moonlit plain; the hearts of both burning for revenge, and each seeming unaware of the presence of the other.

The noble black steed of the young scout behaved grandly, notwithstanding the terrible gallop over the prairie, to the burning ranch of the Greenes; but the hardy horse of the Waco chief kept in the lead. Soon the dark line that marked the timber of the Rio Medina, became visible in the lesser gloom ahead; and no sign of the Apache war-party met the view of these sworn rescuers and avengers.

This fact caused Wild Wolf to curb the speed of his horse; proceeding more slowly, while Gerald coming up, joined him.

"Well, Wild Wolf, what do you make of the signs ahead?" the young man inquired.

"Apache ride in woods. Mebbe so, see Wild Wolf. Mebbe so see Hawk Eye. Mebbe so hide in bush. Then shoot. Wild Wolf been on many war-paths. He is not a fool."

"I don't believe that the red devils will linger," said Gerald. "They must know that the blaze of the ranch will alarm the rancheros."

"Black Wolf, the Apache, is cunning like fox. He make broad trail when go to Greene's Ranch. Then he go back fast. Get scalps. Get horses. Waugh! Look!"

"What is that? I hear rifle-shots!"

The Waco was silent for the moment.

Then Gerald cried out:

"By Heavens! They have attacked and fired Brown's Ranch! It must be a large war-party to be so bold."

"Come on, Wild Wolf! Death and horror are on the Medina, as well as on Cottonwood creek."

But there was no need to urge on the Waco chief: for, with a half-suppressed cry, he lashed his horse, and the two men dashed over the plain.

Neither feared an ambush, for they well knew that the Apaches were recklessly confident, and were bent upon the immediate destruction of the ranch; after which they would depart at speed with the plunder and scalps.

The horrible din that ruled about the burning ranch soon met the ears of our two friends, who now dashed into the bottom-timber, passed through it, and then walked their animals amid the undergrowth to the border of the same, and directly in the rear of the flames.

Just in time were they to see the victorious horde of Apaches dash away over the plain toward the herds of animals belonging to the ranch which they had destroyed and those adjacent.

The fierce cracking and roaring flames prevented any conversation between them as they

urged their horses along the border of the bushes toward the corrals, where they could get a view of the front of the dwelling.

Then, as they gazed forth, Gerald exclaimed:

"Great God! what does this mean? The red fiends have slain a score of fighting Texans!

"Look, Waco! Look at the women and children! This is worse than Greene's Ranch. By Heavens! I swear that not one of that war-party shall ever see the Rio Pecos!"

"Waugh!" burst from the lips of Wild Wolf, as he clutched the handle of his scalping-knife.

"Black Wolf heap cunning like fox. Wild Wolf say so to white brother. Rancheros see big Apache trail before sun go. All come to Brown's Ranch. Say go on trail when sun come. Think Apache go to Frio. All go to sleep."

"When wake up, war-cry sound in ears. Apache arrows fly fast. Texans heap big fools. Sound death-yells. Lose scalps. Waugh!"

"It is bad. Come! War-path open."

"That is probably the explanation of it," said Gerald. "This is horrible, but the blaze will arouse the Texans who were not aware of the advance of Black Wolf. But what are we to do?

"I have never been so affected on a trail. The thought of Gracie and her father, along with this, almost unfits me for even reasonable thought."

"But do lead on! I am frantic to do something toward rescuing my helpless, suffering friends from these inhuman monsters."

"Ride in woods up river. Then ride on plain where fire no shine. Wild Wolf is Waco chief. Black Wolf is Apache dog. Dove Eye shall ride back with my white brother. White Chief shall not be tied to torture-stake."

"I pray that your prediction may prove true. My only hope rests with you, Wild Wolf. But, lead on! We can be of no use here."

"Great Heavens! This is sickening. Blood seems to float in the air. Lead on, I say, or I shall go mad!"

Wild Wolf dashed quickly around, in the rear of the burning dwelling, amid the timber, close followed by Gerald. Then, away they went, up the stream, crashing through the undergrowth, but concealed from view.

Thus they rode, for half a mile. Then, as the flames had died down, and the Apaches were far off on the prairie, both spurred after. They well knew that, even were they observed, the Apaches would not turn back, in their headlong flight, to investigate the character of but two horsemen.

Had Gerald and the Waco chief cast a glance in their rear, over the south plain, as they entered the timber of the Rio Medina, when the ranch first burst into a blaze, they would have seen two equestrians, speeding toward them; although at such a distance, that neither party could have decided the race to which the other belonged.

These were none other than Warnona and Gracie; and both slackened speed, upon discovering the two horsemen in their far front.

When the ranch blazed up, Warnona reasoned that the war-party were the authors of the conflagration; and not only this, but she felt sure that the plunder from Greene's Ranch, as well as Captain Greene himself, were not with the main war-party, but had been ordered to proceed more to the south.

Knowing well the horrors that would be encountered at the burning ranch, after the departure of the Apaches, and not wishing Dove Eye to be agonized more than she had been already, Warnona guided her horse more to the south, and upon reaching the timber, halted to rest, and await the departure of the war-party from the Medina.

Thus it happened, that shortly after Wild Wolf and Gerald left the timber, and proceeded on the trail of the Apaches, Gracie and Warnona were gazing upon them from the border of the timber, believing them to be Apache side-scouts, or spies.

There were two brave men, riding on in pursuit of a horde of murder-mad Apaches, for the purpose of rescuing a maiden, who was even then behind them; and she, bent upon the saving of her father and lover from torture.

Warnona, also, would have felt the utmost relief and joy, to have known where her lordly warrior, Wild Wolf, then was; yet she was gazing upon him, and thinking him to be an Apache.

What the feelings of the young scout would have been, had he known Gracie Greene to be thus safe, it is not in the power of words to describe.

Wild Wolf, too, would have been greatly re-

lieved, had he known that only the White Chief was to be rescued; and equally concerned, if he had been aware, that his squaw, Warnona, was on the trail, thus periling her life for naught.

Thus were matters, when Gracie and Warnona, keeping in the shades, discovered half a dozen horsemen galloping from the southwest, and joining the two riders; all then proceeding leisurely west—a fact, which caused the squaw to believe, beyond a doubt, that they were a portion of the Apache war-party.

This caused her and Gracie to speed toward the Medina, higher up the stream; as soon as they could do so, and not be liable to discovery.

Both Wild Wolf and Gerald were greatly rejoiced, when they perceived the little band of horsemen galloping toward them from the south; for they were confident that the party were Texans. This proved to be true and Texans who were greatly needed in a dire emergency.

"In ther name o' ther Great Ormigthy, pard's, what's ther difficulty down ther Merdina? Shake, Wild Wolf and Hawk Eye! An' spit out yer infermases speedy. What in thunderation sot Brown's Ranch afire?"

The speaker, as he shot out these words, in a rapid voice, with manner and intonation which proved that he had his suspicions of the dread truth, was a man of large frame, and great muscular strength, being none other than the noted scout, Big Foot Wallace.

His honest, open face would at once convince a physiognomist that he was one of nature's noblemen.

Guileless as a child, when mingling with his pals off the trail, he was a terrible man in a fight. Invincible, when pitted against the bandits of the Rio Grande, or the red pirates of the plains, whom he mowed down like blades of grass.

He, as well as the picked trailers and scouts with him, was attired in the border style of the southwest. They were also armed with Sharp's carbines, and Colt's revolvers, of army size, each having a pair. They had, too, their bowie-knives, and though they were few in number, were a formidable party for foes to meet.

In a few moments, Gerald explained, in detail, the awful occurrences of the night; and all listened intently, with teeth set, and a look of suppressed fury upon their faces—all being more eager for revenge, from the fact, that the slain were known, and held in high regard by them. In fact, as the frontier goes, they were neighbors; Big Foot calling the Frio country his home.

"Wa-al, in marcy's name, what air ther good Lord doin', ter low ther pesky heathuns ter scarify, scalp, an' cut off this hyer yearth, afore the'r time, a heap o' innercent white humans?

"Dog-gone my hide! I'm sot back wuss'n pison. But thar ain't no time ter gab. Ther cap'n an' Grace must be reskied, an' thet speedy.

"Boyees, we'll keep on ther no'th side o' ther hellyuns, an' Wild Wolf and Hawk Eye had better lunge right ahead, es they war goin'. Arter we gits into ther oaks, hit'll be mighty easy keepin' nigh ther or'nary red scum.

"Ef we'uns doesn't gi'n 'em a hefty rifle o' fight, I'll crawl inter a post-oak bog, an' flip-flop out o' sight o' human natur' ontel Gabriel toots his horn.

"Ef thar doesn't be a few death-yells fer every leetle child ther hellyuns bev scalped, I hopes ter be tortur'd by Piute squaws!

"Come on! Levant's ther word. Keep yer peeler skinned. Black Wolf 'll camp on ther Merdina afore sun-up. Whoop'er-up fer bleed an' Injun ha'r!"

And thus it happened, that more avengers were on the trail; Big-Foot Wallace having been encamped on the Rio Medina, some distance from Brown's Ranch, and discovering the fire, had ordered the scouts to saddle, and ride off to investigate.

CHAPTER IX.

A NIGHT OF DEATH.

BUT a short distance had the Apaches to proceed westward, before they reached a section of country that was overgrown with post-oaks.

Through this they could ride at a gallop, as there was no undergrowth. Thus they were enabled to proceed at speed.

This post-oak belt extended to, and beyond the Rio Medina; consequently there was no danger of Wild Wolf and Gerald being seen by the Indians, even when galloping within a short distance of them.

Thus, through the night, rode friend and foe. Captain Greene, who, bound to the mustang, his brain almost paralyzed from all that he had

undergone, at times prayed for death to relieve him, and at times, in frantic manner, upbraided his Maker, his fellow-men, and himself; cursing the fates, that had overwhelmed him with an avalanche of misery, despair, and death!

The mustang, upon which he was secured, was led by a burly brave, who, at times, lashed the old man with his quirt, uttering taunting words at his wretched captive. But he noticed them not; still gazing straight upward at the sky, between the branches of the oaks, his eyes glassy, and insane in their expression.

But three rifle-shots north of the war-party, rode at speed, Big-Foot Wallace and his trusty, daring scouts; they reining up at times, to listen to the rumble of the hundreds of hoofs upon the sward, and thus keeping at a proper distance. To the south of Wild Wolf and Gerald Granger, and a little in the rear, rode Warnona and Gracie; closely resembling each other.

Paint-daubed, and with a beaded fillet confining her long flowing hair, Gracie Greene had the appearance of a young and beautiful squaw.

The consciousness that she was speeding to the rescue of her only living relative, and her lover, at the risk of her life, gave her a wild look.

Desperation was noticeable through the bars of war-paint, and was in consonance with her assumed character and attire.

The speed with which they were obliged to travel, and through those long, weary hours of the night, would, at any other time, have caused her to become too fatigued to proceed. But the excited state of the poor girl's brain, her great grief, and apprehension for her father, and her lover, banished all thought of bodily fatigue.

Her nerves were electrified by an insane eagerness to look again upon all that was left to her, even though she should become, the next moment, herself a victim to Apache cruelty.

Bent forward in their saddles, clutching jaw-strap in one hand, and fast hissing quirt in the other, their snake-like eyes shooting swift glances on every side, thus on galloped the murderous pirates of the Pecos; the panting herd of stolen animals thundering in their front, and kept on the course by "side-riders." Close in the rear followed the mustangs, with the corpses of their former masters bound upon their backs; hideous in life, more hideous, a thousand times, now in death!

It was a spectacle that no pen can describe, and no pencil portray. So horrible was it, that none who have not gazed upon such a scene can approach its appalling hellishness, even in imagination.

But we draw a curtain upon all—the painted Apache savages, and the daring rescuers and avengers; to remove it, when the sunlight again brightens the earth, though it lessens not a whit the hideousness of the horde of murderous demons!

The sun shot up from the orient, a huge globe of fire, its disk clearly outlined against the gray sky beyond. Its face seemed inflamed with passion, at being forced to dispense its heat and light upon the eastern hemisphere, leaving the wide plains, the grand old woods and the lofty mountains of America, to recover from the effects of its burning power of the previous day.

Brightly its rays were reflected upon the naturally enameled foliage of the oaks; and the millions of dew-drops, on grass and flowers, were transformed into glittering jewels, that were dazzling to look upon.

Within a horse-shoe bend of the Rio Medina, but a little distance east from the Bandera Hills, and some fifty miles from the scene of their hellish work on Cottonwood creek, were encamped the Apache war-party.

The bend presented a scene that was most horrid and unearthly.

At least five acres of clear, grass-grown sward were within the curve. It was circular in shape; a narrow space toward the north, between a gateway of towering trees, giving entrance and egress. Over that portion of the clear space nearest this entrance, were the mustangs that had been ridden by the Indians.

These were now free from their primitive equipments, but covered with foam; their hair matted, and clinging to their hides, their bellies hollow and gaunt. The animals were so fatigued that they tore the grass from the sod listlessly, although craving it, and masticated it in a weary and laborious manner. All the time they shot glances into the dark shades, as if the

startling scenes of the night were recalled, and a fear existed that they might be repeated.

It was plain that some time must be given the mustangs to rest and recuperate, before proceeding toward the Rio Pecos.

The stolen horses were in little better condition, and seemed terribly affrighted.

At the entrance to the bend, lay half a dozen braves upon blankets, their arms by their sides; while, high up in the tree-tops, were perched two warriors, whose gaze was fixed upon the plain to the east, which was nearly free from oaks.

At the inner side of the curve, near the border of the undergrowth, and beneath the spreading limbs of the huge trees, lay the Apache slain, side by side; with the weapons they had used in war upon their breasts.

But a short distance from these corpses, bound to the trunk of a tree, in a standing position, was Captain Greene; his head bowed, and his gray locks hanging downward, almost concealing his features from view.

A most pitiable sight was the old ranchero; his clothing, torn and stained with the blood of his youngest and darling child!

Opposite to the captive, upon blankets, lay three wounded braves; their eyes fixed upon the branches overhead, and only the look of agony on their stolid features betraying the torture they suffered. Not a sigh or groan escaped them.

Blood-smeared and silent they lay, suffering stoically; as, to betray their agony, by groan or complaint, would have been cowardice, only befitting a squaw or papoose.

Nearly a score of dead and wounded lay thus.

Some twenty paces in front of these, was the main portion of the war-party; flitting around several fires, casting mule-steaks upon the coals, only to scorch the meat, and then tearing and devouring it like ravenous beasts.

Counting the braves, who were on guard at the entrance, there were forty warriors in the camp, who were able for duty.

Not a ray of sunlight penetrated the bend; the entrance being to the north, and the camp, with that exception, surrounded by dense towering timber, beneath which was the tangled, thorny undergrowth. Twenty yards beyond the border of the same, flowed the river; its waters gliding beneath a natural archway of interlaced limbs, which were covered with vines and moss. These shielded the dark stream entirely from the sun.

The Apaches were elated at the success of their raid. Black Wolf was exultant and proud, at having successfully deceived the Texans.

Not the slightest fear had he now of pursuit, especially after gaining such a distance from the scenes of both massacres; and a feast, followed by a war-dance, and the burial of the slain, was his programme. During this, the mustangs could recover from their fatigue.

The slain had lost their lives in battle, with the war-whoop on their lips, when the death-yell sounded, and their scalps were on their heads; consequently, they had gone to the "happy hunting-grounds." For this reason, they were not to be regretted, although they must be avenged in the time to come.

Thus was the camp of Black Wolf, when suddenly, a whoop from the plain brought the lounging guards to their feet, and all the braves erect in position, and manner of interest.

The warriors gave a peculiar yell of exultation, and sprung to each side of the entrance, dragging their blankets after them.

The next moment, a half-dozen braves dashed, at headlong speed, upon their snorting mustangs, into the bend, with wild, ringing whoops.

In their midst, bound fast to horses, were two strong, hardy rancheros.

A terrific yell of fiendish joy burst from the war-party, at sight of the Texan captives.

The two men were bareheaded with hair flying; their faces the pallor of death, and stamped with despair. They were dragged roughly from their horses; both being wounded and blood-stained, one with a broken arm, and the other with the shaft of an arrow still projecting from his breast.

Most torturing were the wounds, as the agonized faces of the unhappy men showed.

Instantly, at the orders of Black Wolf, a stake was driven into the earth, near the fires, and the Texans were bound to it, back to back.

Then several braves rushed to the corpses of their comrades, to place them in a circle around the captives, who were to form central figures in the death-dance; and upon whom the Apaches would vent their vengeful fury for the slaying of such a number of the war-party.

That the ceremony was hastened by the unex-

pected and welcome arrival of these two captives, who could not, in their wounded state, be taken to the far-away village, for torture, was very evident. But an astounding surprise awaited the braves, who had been dispatched for the slain.

They stooped to raise the corpses. Then all sprung erect uttering yells of fury and amazement.

Black Wolf strode forward to the border of the undergrowth, with anger in his eyes.

One glance, however, at the dead, caused the Apache chief to utter a whoop of tiger-like ferocity; while he clutched at the handle of his knife, and shot glances of baffled rage and bewilderment into the shades.

All the dead Apaches had been scalped, since they had been laid upon the sward!

Black Wolf strode nearer, as a brave pointed significantly to the face of one of the corpses; then, up and down went his finger to them all.

Across the forehead of each had been drawn a knife. Also, from temple to temple—thus forming a cross!

Another furious yell burst from the chief.

"Waugh!" he exclaimed. "Wild Wolf! Waco on war-path. Let my young braves bring scalp of Waco chief. I have spoken."

The last words came in a tone of fierce command, as Black Wolf pointed to the shades of the timber.

Tightening their belts, the half-dozen warriors, who had been ordered to bring the dead, sprung into the thickets to obey their chief.

Black Wolf returned to the fires, a most murderous light in his eyes; then to the captives, and with one slash of his knife cut the cords that bound them to the stake. Both fell forward upon their faces to the earth, their arms being secured behind them.

"Bring mustangs, so many," ordered the chief, holding up four fingers. "Heap wild mustangs. It is good."

Braves started to obey the order, lassoing the four wildest animals in the herd.

These were forced, with frantic snorts, to the camp-fires, near the captives.

Black Wolf's face was filled with fury. His yes flashed from the framework of paint daubs, in a most murderous manner.

Springing forward, he circled his knife about the heads of the Texans, and tore off their reeking scalps; the victims shrieking, in their fearful agony.

The mustangs were then nocked together, in pairs, loosely; then lariats from the neck-rope were extended along the backs of the animals, encircling the croup, and leaving about ten feet trailing on the earth.

The ends of the slack were then passed through a knife slit, between the ankle-bone and muscles of each limb of the doomed rancheros, whose shrieks of agony, and cries for the mercy denied them, filled the air.

Thus, two horses were secured to each, the animals being pricked with knives until frantic with pain; several warriors exerting all their strength to hold them.

Then Black Wolf gave a signal-whoop, and the war-party became extended in two lines, forming a lane to the entrance to the bend.

Another signal from the chief, and the braves who held the horses sprung aside, thus allowing the animals freedom.

At that moment terrific yells broke from all, and the beasts were pricked with arrows.

Away, with terrified snorts, bounded the four horses; each pair dragging over the earth a scalped and wounded Texan, tearing the clothing from their forms, and mangling their flesh. And, hot after, sprung the Apaches, yelling like demons, and drowning the cries of the horribly tortured rancheros.

Like arrows shot from bows, away went the frightened mustangs, dragging the two doomed sufferers to death!

Suddenly the yells of the Apaches ceased.

All, as they gained the entrance to the bend, made a sudden halt, in a mingled mass; their eyes filled with the most intense amazement and vengeful fury—each emotion following the other.

And well might they entertain these emotions; for the six braves, who had acted as guards at the entrance, now lay upon their blankets, on either side.

They had taken no notice of the fast-dashing horses dragging the wretched captives; no notice of the wild, exultant whoops of their comrade braves. Silent they lay, their eyes fixed upon the sky, glassy and soulless.

Their scalps had been torn from their heads, and each had his right ear severed clean.

From these silent sentinels, whose last shout

of warning had been given, all gazed instinctively—gazed upward, to the tops of the towering trees, where the two "lookouts" had been posted.

There, dangling, each by one leg, which was secured to a branch—their gory heads showing that their scalps had been taken also—hung the two warriors who had been stationed to scan the plain.

At this sight—the scalping of the slain being connected with it—there arose such a yell of furious vengeance as would have curdled the blood of one who had never heard the like, causing him to shudder with a horror inexpressible!

CHAPTER X.

HOW IT WAS DONE.

WHEN the first gray streaks shot up from the eastern horizon, heralding the coming morn, and the Apache war-party turned the herd toward the Rio Medina, Big-Foot Wallace and his fellow-scouts swept on ahead, before the open plain beyond the scattering oaks was reached, and were watching, from the bottom-timber, the approach of the red foe to the bend.

The scouts well knew that the Indians would first feast, then rest, and then proceed to bury their dead. This they would do, without sending out spies or maintaining a strict guard.

Consequently they secreted their horses, and at once began to reconnoiter.

"We-uns hes gut ter pick off ther scatterin' scum a few at a time, boyees," said Big-Foot. "Hit won't do ter shoot, unless ter save our ha'r."

"Thar's a hefty batch on 'em, an' they needs thinnin' out; an' hit hes gut ter be did, sure es shootin'. I reckon we-uns kin sorter weaken that pack o' perrarer piruts some considerble, 'thout lowin' any on 'em ter spit out a death-squeal. Pity we can't do hit hullsale."

"Hit makes me squarm all over ter think o' Greene's Ranch an' Brown's. Ef ther Waco'll git in some o' his work on t'other side ther camp, with ther help o' Hawk Eye, we-uns'll mix up an' flustercate ther hull lay-out, makin' em wish they'd stopped t'other side o' ther Pecos, chawin' baked dogs. When—"

Big-Foot was here interrupted by a slight movement in the bushes.

All brought their weapons to bear, and stood ready.

"Hop ther cuss, an' slash him wi' yer stickers! Don't 'low a yelp ter spile our biz."

Thus ordered Big-Foot; but at that moment a peculiar sound was heard, and the next instant Wild Wolf glided forward, uttering his favorite and very meaning ejaculation:

"Waugh!"
"Welcome, Waco! Hit's good fer sore peepers ter gaze et yer," said the giant scout, extending his hand, which was grasped by the chief.

"Whar's Hawk Eye? Thar's plenty o' biz hyer-abouts. What yer foun'? Anythin' wo'th gab?"

"Hawk Eye in bush by river. Heap bad in head. Dove Eye no captive. No in Apache camp. Mebbe so kill, scalp, in bush on Cottonwood creek. Hawk Eye want go on back trail. Think find Dove Eye."

"Jumpin' Jerusalem!" exclaimed Big-Foot. "What's become o' ther leetle gal? I thought yer war dead sure she war tuck, gobbed up by ther cussed 'Paches!"

"Hawk Eye say so. Wild Wolf no at ranch." "Hev yer see'd thor cap'n?"
"White Chief tie to tree in Apache camp." "Air be ther only captive?"

"He all. No see more."

"Waal, that's strange; but I'll bet my critter ag'in' a horned frog she hain't bin hurted. Lectle Gracie'd be long o' ther hellyuns, ef they'd friz ther peepers onto her."

"Tell Hawk Eye ter brace up. We-uns must lunge in arter Cap'n Greene when thar's a show. Arter we bes him right side up wi' care, we'll skute down-country, an' scout fer Gracie."

Further conversation was now interrupted by the whoops of the Apaches, as the two Texans were brought into camp.

"Dang'd ef I doesn't b'lieve they've brung'd ther leetle gal in this time, by ther yelps."

"Waugh!" said Wild Wolf, and he whirled and bounded on the back trail.

"Three on yer skute, boyees, an' fotch up t'other side ther openin' ter ther bend! Thar'll be some reds posted thar, an' we-uns must take 'em all outen ther dew, without a yell."

Three of the scouts at once started to obey this order. Big-Foot and the remaining two

proceeded stealthily through the bushes to the west side of the entrance, and when they arrived in the vicinity, wormed their way to a position from which they could not only view the camp, but the sentinels as well. These, upon the approach of the braves with the Texan captives, had parted, three dragging their blankets to each side of the entrance to allow their comrades to pass.

Previous to the arrival of Wild Wolf at the open space where he had met the scouts, he had performed a daring feat.

The chief and Gerald, who had decided from the course traveled by the war-party that the Apaches would encamp in the bend, had gained a favorable position in the trees to view the "open."

Great had been the amazement of both on discovering that Gracie was not a captive; but this was not a relief to either, as it might indicate that she had been slain.

Gerald could believe only the worst. Gracie, he felt assured, could not have escaped from the ranch.

The Waco chief was not one to remain long inactive in sight of his hated foes; and as he perceived the slain Apaches he vowed mentally that their scalps should hang at his belt.

With a gesture of caution to Gerald, Wild Wolf slid down from his perch in the tree.

Then, when the Apaches were feasting on the mule-meat, he crawled in and dexterously scalped all the slain warriors, leaving his mark on the brow of each. It was hazardous in the extreme, but he accomplished it.

He then directed Gerald to climb higher up the tree and await his return; or, if he chose, to take his position nearer the river, which would be safer should a search be instituted before the chief returned.

The young scout took the latter course; more, however, that he might speak with the chief, than to practice prudence.

In a few words Wild Wolf explained that he was going to seek Big-Foot and the other scouts, to plan their future operations. After giving this information, the chief proceeded on his errand with success, as we have seen.

When the Waco returned from the scouts, he not having mentioned his scalping feat, he quickly joined Gerald, and the two crouched in the undergrowth, at a distance from the slain Apaches, both intensely eager to discover the meaning of the terrific yells of the war-party. Wild Wolf kept close to the young scout, in order to control him, should the commotion prove to be caused by the bringing in of Gracie Greene, as he feared.

But we will leave them, and follow their trail later, for our attention must now be centered at the entrance to the camp, to explain the death of the sentinels.

When Big-Foot and his pards saw that the whoops of the Apaches were caused by the arrival of several braves, with two captive Texans—both of whom were known to them—they were furious, and could with difficulty control themselves, all wishing to dash to the rescue of the captives. But second thoughts caused them to grate their teeth, and by a powerful effort of the will, keep their position; for they realized that it would be sure death to all, should they attempt a rescue.

They were forced to witness the dragging of the wounded rancheros from their horses, and the binding of the doomed pair to the stake.

They then knew that a terrible torture scene was to be enacted before their eyes, after the death-dance was finished.

Such was the commotion in the camp, all the Apaches being near to, and gazing at the captives—as well as were the sentinels—that Big-Foot saw a grand opportunity to do some good work.

He instantly sprung up a tree, the largest at the side of the entrance; for he had discovered a sentinel on a gigantic pecan, across the neck of the bend, and he felt that another was perched above the position of himself and the scouts.

His pards on the opposite side were on the watch for a signal; and they discovered Big-Foot, who, by signs, made known his desire that the sentinel above them be dispatched at once.

Quickly one of the trio sprung up the tree, which was hung with vines and moss; and both he and Big-Foot climbed silently on their mission.

In two minutes more, both the Apaches, who had been placed on the trees for "lookouts," hung from branches by their legs, being bound to the same, dead and scalpless. This was accomplished without having been noticed by the

braves below, their attention being drawn to the proceedings in camp.

As Big-Foot descended, he signaled his pards over the opposite side of the entrance, to slay the three sentinels on their side, and then to hasten from the vicinity to the base of the bend, near the river.

Then it was that the horrible whoops sounded, as the Apaches discovered that their dead had been scalped and marked by the terrible Waco chief.

No more favorable time could have been chosen for killing the sentinels than this, for they were standing gazing down into the camp, where all was confusion, Black Wolf being then cutting the captive Texans free from the stake, and ordering the wild mustangs to be brought forward.

Big-Foot made a few gestures with his hand to his pards over the way, and soon after gave out the peculiar cry of a night-bird. The next instant each one of the sentinels was clutched by the throat, thus preventing yells, and knives were plunged into their hearts.

Every warrior was thus dispatched by the terrible bowies, then scalped and laid upon their blankets.

Big-Foot left plain "sign" to enable the Apaches to see who it was that had thus outwitted them by severing the right ear of each—his well-known mark.

This was done while the Apaches were securing the two Texans to the horses to be dragged to death, and not a warrior looked toward the entrance.

The shrieks of the doomed men so tortured the scouts, who were powerless to rescue their friends, that they stole away into the depths of the timber in a circling course, aiming to reach a point near to Captain Greene, whose position and evident agony had caused them much anguish of heart.

All wished to rescue the old ranchero at any and all hazards.

Another reason for the scouts thus proceeding was that they had observed the six braves dash into the timber, at the command of Black Wolf, after the discovery that the dead braves had been scalped, their object being, evidently, to trace and capture the perpetrators of the deed.

The vengeful yells as the discovery was made by the Apache horde that the sentinels had been slain and scalped in broad daylight, coupled with the scalping of the dead whom they had brought from Greene's and Brown's ranches, caused the warriors to be insanely eager to capture the defested Waco and the Giant Scout. But well they knew that it was next to impossible to capture either; but, nevertheless, Black Wolf ordered a score of braves to search the timber on both sides of the bend from the camp to the river—both parties meeting at the base of the bend.

At once the search began.

The thickets were penetrated and beaten with clubs by the frantically furious braves.

Black Wolf, the remainder of his warriors following him, returned to the bend's inner swell near the camp-fires.

Then, and not until then, was another most startling discovery made by the Apaches.

Their captive, Captain Greene, who had been securely lashed to a tree, and who had seemed more dead than alive, was nowhere to be seen.

The old ranchero had in some manner escaped, probably assisted by the Giant Scout, or the Waco chief.

Thus reasoned Black Wolf, his snake-like eyes flashing with murderous expressions.

His war-party had met with grand success; but there seemed to be a turn in the tide, for everything had gone wrong since he had encamped. The savage chief was almost beside himself with rage, grief and anxiety of mind, as well as fatigue of body. He had thought to gain much praise and prestige by this raid; but his prospects seemed very slim.

A score of braves followed their chief, who dashed into the timber, from the point where the dead had lain, toward the river; ordering his followers to spread out in a long line, in order that they might not lose the chance of capturing Wild Wolf, the Waco.

But, a moment after, the chief was again astounded and enraged by a horrible whoop near at hand.

This spoke of death by its depth, strangeness, and intonation.

Another, and still another whoop sounded; and it was soon ascertained that the braves who had been sent out to search for the despoilers and mutilators of their slain, had also met death!

They lay scalped here and there, each with

a gaping wound in his breast; their hearts cloven by bowie-knives, while that dread mark upon their foreheads told the whole story.

Their slayer was the terrible Waco chief, Wild Wolf!

CHAPTER XI.

WOMEN ON THE WAR-PATH.

We will now return to Warnona and Dove Eye.

Both had galloped on, through the post-oaks, the Waco squaw seeming to keep her course by instinct; although, at times, she would jerk her horse to a halt, dismount, and place her ear to the ground. Then, seemingly satisfied, she would remount and dash on without addressing Gracie; at whom, however, she would now and then glance with deep solicitude.

The latter had arrived at a most peculiar state of mind.

Her terrible bereavement, and the horrors through which she had passed, together with the long and weary gallop, had dazed her overtaxed brain, and her eyes were glassy and unnatural in expression. She had been overwhelmed with such grief and anguish as few maidens could have borne, and retain their reason; but the consciousness that all of her loved ones, except her father and her lover, were slain, and that she would be alone in the world, if they too should be victims—this caused her to bear up, and keep but one object before her mind.

This was, to rescue her only parent and Gerald, or die in the attempt.

As has been stated, Gracie Greene would never have thought of such an attempt, considering it impossible, had not she been prompted and led by the indomitable Warnona.

The Waco squaw seemed to be possessed with the assurance, daring, bravery, and skill of a warrior; and she instilled into the mind of Gracie something of these qualities, so needful to the occasion.

At first, upon discovering the remains of her loved ones, the poor girl had felt no desire to live; but, afterward, when she became convinced that her father and Gerald were captives, she was filled with an insane desire to do all in her power to rescue them from such a terrible fate. This seemed possible of accomplishment, after Warnona's reasonings, and decided resolve to attempt thefeat.

The very costume she had donned, the war-paint, and the companionship of the Waco woman, impressed Gracie, and imbued her with resolute daring, and a firm reliance on the squaw and herself.

Her mind was in such a strange and unnatural state, that she acted in a manner strange to herself.

She imagined that she was gifted with strength and skill for the occasion—that she was to take a strong part in a magic drama, which would end in the liberation of the two so dear to her—this strength and fortitude being given her, as an avenger; and that she would be guided, scathless, through the dread ordeal.

It was a strange and beautiful sight to see that pair of female avengers, and determined rescuers, as they sped on their dangerous mission.

Knowing the peril, ahead of them, and that they were liable to fall into the hands of the Apaches, and be doomed to a fate, which caused a convulsive shudder to think of—knowing this, and all that depended upon caution—Warnona, before it was dawn, forded the river, and passing the belt of timber, to the south plain, proceeded on, up the Medina, Gracie following her without comment.

At times, both would halt, and as the Apaches were on the verge of the timber north of them, and near to the point where they intended camping, the sound of the galloping horses could be detected easily.

From this fact, the squaw was enabled to locate the camp, when the sun first appeared in the east.

She searched, hastily, for a place in which they could leave the horses. This was soon found, and loosening girths, and removing bridles, the animals were left to graze in a small "open."

Warnona and Gracie then proceeded to the bank of the river, where the sounds from the Apache camp betrayed its exact position.

Then it was, that the free and rambling life of Gracie Greene favored her; for Warnona decided to climb a tree, and cross over the river upon the interlaced branches, and then on, in the same manner, to the border of the bottom-timber. From that locality, they could, without danger of discovery in the vine and moss-

draped limbs, view the Apache camp, and decide upon their future operations.

Warnona did not, herself, believe there would be an opportunity to rescue the captives until the following night, under cover of the darkness; but she hoped that something favorable might occur.

Although quite weary, from the long night-ride, Gracie appeared to be gifted with skill and determination. She climbed nearly as well as the Waco squaw, and in a little time, they both arrived at a point, from which they could view the camp of the war-party; themselves being concealed from view.

At the very moment that they gained a favorable position, whence they could behold the savage scenes in the "open" of the bend, Wild Wolf was scalping the Apache corpses; while the war-party were engaged in appeasing their voracious appetites, and consequently not watchful, especially in the direction of a point which they deemed perfectly secure.

Warnona, however, could not see her warrior husband; and he had not the slightest suspicion of her presence.

Thus it was, that the Waco chief, his squaw, Gerald Granger, and Gracie, were within twenty yards of each other; the males dreaming not of the presence of the females, and no probability, under the circumstances, of either party's being made aware that the others were in their neighborhood.

Stealthily Warnona made her way into different portions of the tree, bidding Gracie remain still and silent; the squaw being determined to ascertain the position of the captives.

Warnona knew that the trail of Gerald, at Greene's Ranch, had been made after the Apaches had departed, and she believed that the young scout had been on the trail of the war-party, and was now in the vicinity; he thinking that the Indians held Gracie captive, as well as her father.

Warnona had deceived the young girl, in this respect, as we have seen, in order to induce her to set out with herself on the trail.

But a very brief time elapsed, when the squaw perceived that Captain Greene was secured to a tree—and the very one, within the branches of which she and Gracie were concealed!

A close inspection of the surroundings decided Warnona that there were no other captives.

While deliberating as to the manner she should inform the captive of her presence, the signal whoops of the rear party of Apaches, who came galloping toward the camp with the two Texans, rung out, followed by the exultant whoops of the entire horde.

Warnona was, at first, greatly excited, fearing that Gerald had been captured; and the sight of her lover being brutally used by the red fiends would cause Gracie to shriek out, or descend to the earth, and rush to her death, in a vain effort to save him.

Considering the state of the bereaved maiden's mind, this did not seem in the least improbable.

Greatly relieved, however, was the squaw, upon finding that Gerald was not one of the last brought in captives; yet she knew the men, and was therefore in a furions state of mind, when she saw them brutally jerked from their horses, by their captors.

But a joyous surprise awaited her, and one of which she had not dreamed.

This was, when Black Wolf ordered the corpses to be placed around the captives at the stake.

As the reader knows, the dead Apaches had been scalped and marked by Wild Wolf.

This surprise was blended with the relief of a most thankful heart, from the fact that when the braves, order'd to bring the dead, sprung from the camp, they ran directly toward the tree in which were Warnona and Gracie.

The first thought of the squaw was that Gracie had been imprudent, and revealed her position among the branches, and that the Indians were about to secure her.

In consequence, Warnona made ready to sell her life dearly, in protecting herself and her friend.

But the braves swerved to the left, and immediately after, Warnona not only knew that she and Gracie were safe for the time being, but that Wild Wolf was near at hand, and on the war path.

The heart of the young squaw swelled with pride, at the thought that her spouse had accomplished such a daring feat as to scalp the enemy's dead, under their very noses.

He was then somewhere near, and Warnona believed that Gerald Granger was with him.

Much relieved and elated was she; and the

furious and vengeful yells of the Apaches, at discovering that their slain had been mutilated, was very gratifying to her.

She had no doubt, now, that the captain would be rescued; but, after following the trail such a distance, Warnona resolved to accomplish the liberation of the White Chief herself. She would thus astonish Wild Wolf and Gerald, who were bent on the same desperate mission.

There was no time to communicate with Gracie, who was higher up in the tree. The squaw saw the Apaches rush with vengeful yells, to secure the two Texans to the half-wild horses, and she knew this was the opportunity she so desired, to communicate with Captain Greene.

Quickly she descended the tree to the lower branches, which were but a few feet distant from the head of the old ranchero. Bending down as far as she could with safety, Warnona let fall a piece of bark directly upon the captain's head; at the same time giving a low hiss of caution.

Slowly the captive raised his head from his bosom, the utmost bewilderment upon his features.

Then Warnona said, in a low, deep voice:

"White Chief keep still. Warnona here in tree. Warnona save White Chief. It is good."

Captain Greene retained sufficient command of himself to avoid looking upward. With wonderful agility, the squaw, with the assistance of a vine, descended on the opposite side of the huge tree from the camp, and at once slashed loose the bonds of the captive, from the tree, and also the cords which were about his ankles. Then she said:

"White Chief stand still. Warnona let lariat down from tree quick. Help White Chief climb up. When Warnona twitch rope, then jump this side tree. Vine here. Rope here. It is good."

The next moment, the brave young squaw was in her former position in the tree.

She then uncoiled a raw-hide lariat from her waist, adjusted the noose in such a manner that it could not slip, and then gave a hiss, lowering the rope, and causing it to swing against the tree-trunk; first assuring herself that the attention of the Apaches was drawn the opposite way.

The keen ears of Warnona had detected strange sounds in the timber near at hand; but they were sounds, the character of which she knew.

She had observed the half-dozen braves bound into the undergrowth, in quest of Wild Wolf; but she felt no fears for the safety of her lordly chief.

As she was cutting loose the captain, and after the peculiar sounds had been detected within the dense shades toward the river—and Warnona well understood them—she knew that Wild Wolf was on the war-path in good earnest.

The Apaches, who had been commanded to secure him, were now being slain by his knife, and prevented by his clutch from uttering the death-yell.

Warnona's heart was glad. Apache scalps would hang thick upon the belt of Wild Wolf.

At the moment that the squaw gave her slight signal, Captain Greene, who was almost overcome by the shrieks of those whom he had recognized as his neighbors, staggered around the tree, as directed, as quickly as his stiffened limbs would permit him to do so.

Little cared he now to live; but to die as the two men before him were to die, was most horrible. It spurred him to a herculean effort to take advantage of this miraculously sent, and most unexpected manner of escape.

The loop was dropped over his head, he adjusted the same under his arms, and in a very short time, by using his whole strength, climbing the vine with the assistance of Warnona, who pulled on the rope, he succeeded in reaching the side of the squaw.

Instantly she grasped the old man's arm, and pointing upward, helped him to climb still further.

Up and up the pair went, Warnona at length bidding the captain remain in a mossem-howered space, while she mounted higher. Then, taking the hand of Gracie, she led her downward, bidding her not to make the slightest noise.

The request was, however, needless; for the poor girl, having sat so long, clutching the branches, while she gazed down into the Apache camp with a horrible fascination ruling her, had witnessed the terrible scene. Even the scalping of the Texan captives, and the start of

the knife-tortured horses, with the dragging victims of Apache cruelty, had not been spared her.

The shrieks and outcries of the doomed men still rung in the poor girl's ears, and she made no objections to retiring from the dread spectacle; all else, but the horrible sufferings of the captives, and the thoughts of the fearful scene at her desolated home, being banished from her mind.

Warnona dare not allow the father and daughter to meet so near the camp, knowing the demoralized state of the minds of both; and she conducted Gracie through the tree-tops, to the very margin of the river-bank. There she left the maiden, secure from discovery, and returned to escort the father.

But a few moments more, when Warnona had guided Captain Greene, in a stealthy manner, half the distance to where his daughter had been left by her, the whole Apache horde, with fierce and vengeful whoops, rushed pell-mell, here and there, through the undergrowth, the discovery having been made, that the braves, who had been dispatched to secure Wild Wolf, had been slain.

Then followed a rattling fusilade of revolver-shots, and Warnona caught a flitting glimpse of Wild Wolf and Gerald, as both plunged into the Rio Medina, and sunk from view beneath the waters; just in time to escape the whooping Apaches.

At the same moment, a piercing shriek rung wildly through the bottom-timber!

Warnona then knew, that Gracie Greene had seen Gerald Granger, and that all was lost.

Their presence in the tree had been betrayed by that insane cry of Dove Eye, upon witnessing the peril of her lover.

CHAPTER XII. FAITHFUL AND TRUE.

WILD WOLF and Gerald did not remain long in ignorance of the cause of the commotion in the Apache camp.

From a covert, which they gained, beyond the corpses which the Waco had scalped, they discovered the *entree* of the braves, with the two captives; and as each recognized the rancheros, their rage became almost ungovernable at the brutality that followed.

Then came the scalping, by the Waco chief, of the braves, which had been brought from the devastated ranches.

Wild Wolf now resolved that he would rescue Captain Greene, before proceeding on the back trail, in search of Dove Eye. Little did Gerald Granger suppose, that his darling was then ensconced in the same tree to which her father was bound, and viewing the same scene with himself.

This so chained the attention of the scouts, that they were, for the time unable to stir; but when the braves were ordered by Black Wolf to rush into the thickets, in search of their unseen foe, the Waco placed his hand upon the shoulder of Gerald, and said:

"Waugh! It is good. Come!"

Without a word, the young man stole through the undergrowth, toward the river, with the chief by his side; each grasping firmly his knife.

The braves started out eagerly, but Wild Wolf had been cunning, and left no "sign," except in the immediate vicinity of the dead warriors. This, he could not well have avoided.

Baffled, the Apaches scattered, and began searching among the undergrowth. Thus they played into the hands of our friends. Skilled as the latter were in woodcraft, and in the use of the knife, it was not long before the six braves lay quivering in death, while a clutch upon their throats at the time the scouts sprung upon them prevented the death-knell which would have warned the main war-party.

No mercy for an Apache dwelt in the hearts of either Gerald Granger or Wild Wolf.

With giant strength, grating teeth, and electric-like movements, the deeds were done; the four being slain, all in different places, and before they had gained half the distance to the river.

The Apaches had heard the struggling among the bushes caused by the last two warriors, and they uttered low guttural ejaculations of surprise.

The cause was soon explained. As the fates had ordained it, both of these braves had halted upon the very edge of the dense thicket, within which crouched the avengers of blood.

The same instant a crashing of bushes in their rear startled the Apache warriors; but, before they could whirl, the iron grip of the red and white scouts was upon their throats, steel flashed before their eyes for a moment, and was

then plunged buckhorn deep into their paint-daubed breasts.

All four were now writhing upon the ground; the death-stricken Apaches striving with their last breath to slay their enemies and to release themselves, then to give the death-yell and danger-signal.

For a few moments this struggle between the living and the dying was terrific, the legs and arms of the contestants becoming locked, and thrashing the bushes violently. But it was of short duration.

At length the death-filmed eyes of the doomed Apaches, which were fixed in vengeful hate and fury upon their slayers, grew dimmer, and their strong, sinewy forms became convulsed with quivering tremors. This soon changed to the rigidity of death, and Wild Wolf and Hawk-Eye loosened their grasp on the throats of their victims and drew forth their deadly knives. Their work was over.

Then the scalps were slashed from the heads of the last of the searchers after the Waco-chief; but hardly were the gory trophies placed in their belts by the panting pair, when, with fearful whoops, Black Wolf and a score of his warriors rushed into the bottom-timber, rendered frantic and insane for revenge at the scalping of their dead, and the slaying of their sentinels at the entrance to the bend.

Neither Wild Wolf nor Gerald was now in a condition to defend himself or hold his ground against overwhelming odds, and both, after glancing into each other's eyes and passing some hasty words of consultation, rushed toward the river.

This was their only way of escape, for they knew by the crashing among the bushes that their foes were advancing at speed in a long line beyond either outer end, and it would be impossible for them to pass. And, indeed, they were none too soon in thus acting, for had they delayed another moment, they would have been in the clutches of the foe. As it was, the Apaches caught sight of them as they darted from the side of their last victims.

A terrific whoop of exultation announced the discovery of the detested Waco and the white-scout; but this was followed, the next moment, by yells of mad fury, caused by the discovery of the two slain and scalped braves, now lying in their gore, side by side. No delay was made, however.

The pursuers, whose yells now filled the air, and echoed through the timber arches, curdling the blood in the veins of poor Gracie Greene, dashed forward. In terrific, desperate bounds, they rushed onward, in the direction of the river and their two foes; the outer wings of the line they formed, inclining inward, and thus making a crescent-like wave of pursuers. The situation was now desperate.

Both Wild Wolf and Gerald realized that escape was impossible—that they could not reach the friendly river-bank, before being overtaken, unless they made some move to stop the headlong course of the infuriated war-party.

They were both greatly fatigued, after their several desperate hand-to-hand conflicts; and the undergrowth greatly impeded their progress.

However, they soon reached a belt of clear space in the timber, where there was no undergrowth of any extent for some little distance.

Upon the further side of this belt, they then jerked their deadly revolvers, and half-whirling, faced their foes, at the very moment that the Apaches broke clear of the thickets, across the open belt.

Then followed a rattling revolver fusilade, which brought to the earth, with horrible death-yells and groans of agony, many an Apache brave.

Not a bullet was wasted.

Cool and calm, although panting with exertion, stood the indomitable pair, side by side, manipulating hammer and trigger with dexterity and celerity, their fire being rapid, and the bullets finding a home in the hearts of their red foes.

Every chamber was emptied before the daring scouts turned, and rushed onward to the river; their ears filled with the most demoniac whoops, yells, and howls, as the Apaches dashed in hot pursuit, now doubly infuriated, and doubly eager and resolved to capture the dreading and hated pair.

So rapid was the rush of pursuit, that barely had our friends gained the high bank of the river, before the red foe were at their backs; and it was when capture seemed inevitable that Gracie saw and recognized Gerald, from her perch in the tree, where she had been left by Warnona.

She then believed that her lover would be captured, and tortured before her eyes, as had been the case with the two unfortunate Texans. Forgetting her own perilous position, the young girl uttered a piercing shriek; she, leaning over a limb, and gazing down, as the sound left her lips. This was at the instant that Wild Wolf and Hawk Eye sprung over the bank, into the river.

That wild cry caused the two men to glance upward as they made the bound, and both caught a flitting glance at the agonized features of Gracie Greene. This sight, and the sound that issued from her lips, which they both knew would betray her into the power of the merciless savages, caused Gerald the deepest anguish, and but little less of anxiety to Wild Wolf; the latter wishing, when too late, that he had more thoroughly inspected the timber.

Both our friends were experienced swimmers and divers and they had formed plans to favor their escape from their pursuers; but these plans were thrown to the winds the moment that the position and danger of Gracie were discovered.

Her presence was a great mystery to each, as they had believed her to be a captive to the Apaches.

When they discovered that the maiden had not been in the hands of the savages they were greatly astonished, for they knew that it was impossible that she could have come thus far by herself.

However, they both now swam under water up the stream, and near the bank. This was steep and high, and the water comparatively still.

As long as was possible the pair glided beneath the dark surface, and then thrust their heads up amid the drooping grass at the bottom of the bank to recover breath. They both knew that they were directly beneath the branches of the very tree in which they had seen poor Gracie.

The dress she wore was that of Warnona, but they recognized the white maiden by her shriek.

Warnona, they well knew, would not have betrayed her presence. She would never have allowed her feelings to overcome her prudence.

A few thoughts, flashing through the brains of the swimmers, convinced one of them that his squaw had been drawn to Greene's Ranch by the blaze while she was out in search of himself—that she had found Dove Eye, attired in one of her own costumes, and set out with her on the trail to rescue the old ranchero; or, it might be, to leave "sign" for the benefit of those who might be like-minded. Thus the chief reasoned.

He was confident that, not only was Dove Eye in great danger, but that his squaw was so, as well.

Pride filled the breast of Wild Wolf, as he realized that Warnona had thus proved herself worthy to be his squaw—the squaw of a Waco chief. She was a true warrior's bride.

As for Gerald, his mind had become, until the discovery of Gracie, more composed and hopeful in regard to her absence, which had puzzled him greatly. Possibly he had reasoned that the theory of Wild Wolf was correct—that is, that she had discovered the Apaches at her home, and gone for help, although such a course did not seem consistent with her character.

All was now made clear, however. Both perceived that their dear ones were doomed did not some unforeseen event occur, to prevent them from falling into the power of the furiously maddened Apaches.

As may be supposed, both Wild Wolf and Gerald were in a very unenviable state of mind, as they protruded their heads amid the grass, that drooped from above the water-line, into the stream.

But, at that very moment, sounds met their ears, that gave them hope, and caused them to hasten up the steep bank; drawing themselves upward by drooping vines, their knives between their teeth.

These encouraging sounds were the yells of Big-Foot Wallace and his scouts; the detonation of whose rifles and revolvers now rung through the timber, accompanied by the hellish whoops of the horde of Apache braves.

It was no easy task, however, to surmount the steep bank, which was there almost perpendicular; even with the assistance of the vines. Especially was this the case, in the wearied condition in which they then were; occasioned by the recent continuous, and desperate hand-to-hand conflicts, and the dash for liberty—together with their fatiguing swim, beneath the surface of the Rio Medina.

The consequence was that much time passed in their attempt. The firing ceased, and all was again quiet in the undergrowth, before our two friends reached the vicinity of the margin of the bank.

Then, a most startling, and totally unexpected event occurred.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE WORK WELL BEGUN.

VERY providentially, Big-Foot Wallace and his scouts, after running to the "open," where they had secreted their horses, and regaining their rifles, reached the vicinity of the river, at the swell of the bend, when their services were most needed by the one of our friends, who has had our deepest sympathy and pity.

For poor Gracie, a moment after she had uttered that shriek, saw that she had sealed her doom.

Neither Gerald nor Wild Wolf, she felt, could come to her assistance. Should they do so, both would be slain—slain through her own thoughtlessness.

In an instant it flashed upon the maiden that the trail of her lover's horse, discovered at the ranch by Warnona, had been made after the departure of the Apaches. He had believed her a captive, and followed the trail of the war-party, being joined by the Waco chief. Then she recalled the solitary horseman, whom she had seen, in the fiery glare of the sunset, as she had ridden from the *barranca*.

Although the hideous Apaches were now gazing up at her, giving vent to their fiendish joy, in terrific yells and whoops; yet, regardless of this, the thoughts of Gracie were only upon Gerald.

Thus, for a brief space, were all parties positioned. Then, at a signal from Black Wolf, a number of braves sprung into the lower branches of the tree in which the young girl was.

Then it was that the report of six rifles, fired as one, burst from the thickets west from the tree; and every brave that had darted to secure Gracie fell crashing to the earth.

Every bullet from the unerring rifles had torn through the vitals of the savage aimed at.

So totally unexpected was this thunderous report, which spoke of more enemies than the Apaches believed were anywhere near them, that the savages were appalled and bewildered.

Then the bullets of revolvers hurtled through their massed ranks, and the Texan yells rung clear, vengeful and taunting, in their ears.

The scene that followed among the war-party was indescribable. That Big-Foot Wallace was in the bottom-timber with some of his scouts, they had known since the discovery of the slain sentinels; but they did not believe that the giant scout was backed by any considerable force.

They soon recovered from their demoralization, and having so much at stake, stood firm, with arrows fitted, ready, at the order of their chief, to rush upon their concealed foes. Yet the signal whoop of Black Wolf sounded not.

Back in the camp was a vast herd of horses and mules, which must be driven beyond the Rio Pecos.

The chief had no captives for the torture, to appease the squaws of the slain; and his reputation and rank were at stake, this being his first war-trail, as head war-chief.

If he returned without captives, the widowed squaws would hurl dirt at him, and spit upon him. The war-path would never again be open to him, especially as he had allowed a captive to be rescued.

These thoughts goaded Black Wolf to frenzy; that which enraged him most, being the fact that the Waco chief had mutilated his dead, and defiled him.

Since encamping, a series of most startling and damaging surprises had occurred, which would go against him as a skillful chief; and there was but one way to redeem himself, and insure an honorable reception on his return to his village.

This was to secure the white squaw, whom he had seen in the tree—for the Apaches perceived that she was white, notwithstanding her paint and costume.

Could he accomplish this, all would yet be well, and he would start at once westward.

Thus thought Black Wolf, as he and his braves crouched, undecided as to their future proceedings.

Being "horse" Indians, they were at a disadvantage in a bushwhacking fight. They realized this; but there seemed no possible way of recovering their losses, or avenging their slain, except by rushing upon the Texans in

the face of the terrible fire which was kept up by them.

Thus were the Apaches posted; the scouts maintaining their ground, ready to receive the red foe, their weapons being all reloaded.

Had the savages rushed into the thickets, and attacked the Texans, after the latter had fired their rapid volleys, the whites would have been annihilated to a man; and Black Wolf, by not making a charge at that time, lost the one grand opportunity, which might have placed all in his power, and enable him to return in triumph, with captives and herds, across the Pecos.

But, as the Apaches started to creep forward, there was another occurrence which must have our attention.

The Indians had been forced to retreat to such a distance from the death-dealing volleys of the scouts, that Gracie was no longer within their view; she being hidden by a perfect maze of branches, moss, and the tops of the thick undergrowth.

The affrighted maiden maintained her position, appalled at the horrible scenes beneath; but yet a great change had come over her since she realized that Gerald was safe, in the river. When the Apaches sprung into the tree to effect her capture, she became firm as a rock; and with a desperate and determined manner, jerked her revolver—an intense loathing, and insane hatred for the murderers of her nearest and dearest ones ruling her mind. That mind had now recovered strength.

She determined to shoot every savage who approached her position; and she would doubtless have done so, had not the bullets of the scouts torn through their ranks and slain them to a man—all falling from the tree into which they had sprung.

The great slaughter, caused by the well-directed revolvers of the scouts, caused Gracie to have some hopes. She had not the remotest idea who were new-comers, and she cared not.

It was sufficient that they were foes to the Apache murderers.

But Warnona was absent, and Gracie began to feel no little anxiety in regard to her. She now felt that Gerald would soon join the men who were in the thickets, and that she and her father would be saved. It was possible that the Waco squaw, in the excitement, had gone to release Captain Greene.

The young girl now quickly descended the tree, keeping upon the branches which leaned over the bank, and the stream itself. The Apaches were just then deliberating as to their next move against the whites.

When Gracie reached a favorable position on the lower branches, she beheld a sight that filled her with horror.

There had been one Apache in the war-party who, during the slaying of his comrade braves, and the fearful din, had kept his wits about him; bearing in mind that the hated Waco chief and his white pard were in the river, and would, without doubt, climb up the bank and join their friends in the thick undergrowth.

Here was a chance for him to win an eagle-feather for his fillet, by taking a captive or a scalp.

This Indian was a powerful brave, and he now shot into the undergrowth, dropping upon his hands and knees.

With the greatest care, the warrior wormed his way toward the margin of the bank, which was fringed with bottom-grass.

It was then that Gracie caught sight of Gerald, as he clutched the vines, and dug his boots into the steep bank; slowly making his way upward, and being nearly to the top, when the brave just mentioned, laid himself down on the very verge of the bank, ready to plunge his weapon into the young man when he reached the top.

It was plain that the savage would have him at his mercy.

The Waco chief was but a few paces beyond, and further up the river.

Both the climbers were at a great disadvantage, and it was apparent to Gracie that, unless she made an effort immediately to save them, they were lost. She must act, and at once.

Most desperate had the bereaved girl become, through the horrors with which she had been so suddenly visited. Her eyes glared with a strange luster, as she gazed upon the outstretched form of the repulsive Apache, and made ready for action.

Gerald Granger climbed higher and higher, his form dripping with water; but the Indian became impatient, expecting each instant that the fight would be renewed, between the whites and his comrades.

Slowly he raised his head, leaning forward, and peeped through the fringe of grass; but

dodged quickly back, for the young scout was directly below him.

The next moment, the head of Gerald was even with the bank. Then, the Apache arose upon his knees, bracing his left hand on the ground, and with his right uplifted, to strike at his white foe.

Gerald saw his danger at once.

Death stared him in the face!

Should he move a muscle, the glittering blade would be plunged into him.

The paint-smeared face was over his own, the snake-like eyes gazing into his, with murderous gloating. Already, in his imagination, the scalp of the white man was in his belt.

He leaned still farther over the bank, raised his right hand higher, to give force to the blow, and brought all his strength to bear upon it.

Just then, when life and death were trembling in the balance for Gerald Granger, a form shot through the air, from the limbs above—a human form, feet downward, with long hair flying, and arms outstretched.

Gerald recognized his lost Gracie!

Down, like a meteor, shot the desperate maiden, her feet striking square, and with great force, upon the shoulders of the savage.

He fell, like a projectile from a catapult, over the bank, into the waters, with a sounding plunge; the beautiful girl also shooting downward. The same moment, Gerald and Wild Wolf loosened their hold upon the vines, and fell over into the river, determined that Gracie should be saved.

Simultaneously, the terrible war-whoop of the combined forces of Black Wolf rung through the timber.

Then Gerald and the Waco appeared above the surface of the waters; the former, with Gracie's senseless form in his arms, and striking out to the opposite side of the river with his fair charge.

The appearance of Wild Wolf was attended with a spattering and foaming of the whirling waters, for he held the astounded Apache in his vise-like grasp.

Face to face were the red enemies.

The left hand of the chief was about the throat of the brave, both treading the water. In the right hand of the Waco he grasped firmly his long scalping-knife, and glared exultantly into the half-strangled Apache's face. The tables had turned.

The air resounded with whoops, yells, the twang of bow-strings, and the sharp crack of fire-arms.

Rallying-cries, death-howls and shrieks of agony, mingled with the taunting, ringing yells of the Texans.

These sounds brought to the front all the war-spirit of the Waco chief. He raised his knife clear of the waters, while the struggling wretch he clutched caused a perfect whirlpool in his frantic endeavors to release himself, his eyes bulging from their sockets with terror.

No mercy was there, however, in the vengeful glitter of Wild Wolf's eye.

The terrible knife described an arch in its rapid course, and was plunged with great force into the breast of the Apache brave.

Then quickly it was withdrawn to circle about the tufted head, the scalp being torn away as the horror-filled eyes of the Indian were filming in death, and the waters around them reddening with his heart's blood!

Down into the depths Wild Wolf thrust the dying Apache, drowning even the gasp and death-rattle, and preventing the signal howl of the vanquished brave.

In a moment more the Waco chief was climbing with the aid of the vines to the bank above, like a squirrel, and soon he gained a footing on terra firma.

Then he gave one lightning-like glance in his rear, over the river.

He now perceived Gerald Granger swimming rapidly on his return, alone.

Wild Wolf knew that Dove Eye was safe, and that the young scout was coming to join in the fight and rescue the old captain and Warnona, both of whom, the two men believed, were in the power of the Apaches.

Loud rung the war-whoop of Wild Wolf, the Waco chief; and he dashed through the undergrowth to the rear of the Apache horde, after giving a gesture to Hawk Eye, indicating his course.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE END CROWNS THE WORK.

WHEN Warnona returned to guide Captain Greene, if possible through the branches of the trees, to the position of Gracie, she was filled with anxiety, at hearing the rush of the Apaches

toward the point where she had left the young girl.

The glimpse she had caught of Wild Wolf and Hawk Eye satisfied her that they would escape; but she was in a most perplexing state of mind in regard to Gracie, feeling that her capture was certain.

Her mind was, however, somewhat relieved, at the report of the rifles and revolvers; she knowing well, that assistance must have arrived. There could be no doubt that the whites and the reds were now engaged in a terrible fight; and Warnona, knowing that she could be of no use, except in assisting the White Chief to avoid recapture, hastened on, until she reached him.

To her surprise, the squaw found Captain Greene much better, and quite in possession of his faculties. He stood erect, upon one limb, clutching at another above his head, and gazed at Warnona, with a strange expression, as she came up. Then his look somewhat softened, as he recognized her, and remembered the near past.

One glance had betrayed the fact to the Waco squaw, that the Apache camp was deserted of all except the wounded; and immediately a plan was formed, in her mind, to take advantage of the situation of affairs.

Quickly she said:

"Come! White Chief go with Warnona. Texans have come. Hear war-cry of Big-Foot. It is good. Blood of squaw and papooses of White Chief call for vengeance. Come!"

Warnona had struck the right chord.

The captain, without a word, descended and followed the Waco squaw. Uncoiling a lasso from her wrist, the latter repeated:

"Come!"

Just then the old ranchero caught sight of the wounded Apaches. His eyes blazed with fury. He sprung forward and caught up some steel-pointed arrows, and stood over them.

The wounded braves gazed in horror.

They knew that their time had come.

With furious rage the old ranchero plunged an arrow into each breast, and then clutching a knife from the belt of a dying brave, he slashed off their scalps. Meanwhile, Warnona had lassoed two mustangs and equipped them. She led them up the captain, who stood holding his gory trophies.

"It is good," said the squaw. "Here is mustang. Come! More Apaches in bottom-timber. Dove Eye in tree. Come!"

At the mention of his daughter's name the old man bounded into the saddle, Warnona holding the jaw-strap of the half-wild mustang, and the captain still grasping the scalps.

"Come!"

Thus spoke the squaw again, as she lashed her own steed toward the vast herd of stolen horses and mules, among which were the mustangs of the war-party.

In five minutes more, almost the entire herd were galloping, in a wild stampede, over the plain, eastward, on the back trail.

This accomplished, Warnona wheeled about, and headed for the camp again.

"Waugh! It is good! War-path open. Come!"

So saying, the Waco squaw led the way.

But, to return to the scene of the fight.

With fierce whoops, the Apaches arose from their crouching postures, and, rushing forward, sent a flight of arrows into the thicket. To their intense surprise, there was no return—no sound from the dense undergrowth.

At the last moment, Big-Foot Wallace had thought of a movement, which would give them a great advantage, by effecting another surprise upon the red foe. Well knew the scouts that their lives hung by a hair; that the overwhelming mass of Apaches would cut them down in a moment's time, did they not again demoralize them by a surprise.

Thus it was, that the giant scout, who was reckless to a fault, but realized the desperate condition of affairs, ordered his pards to draw back stealthily, to another line of thickets, west from their position; and, before which was a narrow open space, extending north and south. The consequence of this was, that the flight of arrows fell harmlessly in the bushes where our friends had just lain in ambush.

It was but for a moment that the Apaches halted in bewilderment. Black Wolf believed that the Texans had fled for their lives, and that all were in his power, did he but act promptly.

With a ringing war-whoop, he rushed forward—his whoop echoed by his warriors—and all with bows half-bent, darted through the thickets in a long line, into the narrow "open."

Some mysterious influence seemed to warn

the red torturers, that their foes were concealed in front: yet, not the slightest sound was there to indicate it.

It was a terrible sight, and to one who knew not their merciless character, perhaps a grand one—to see every bronzed warrior, standing, with left foot forward, bows bent, eyes glaring into the thicket, and their long black hair hanging, bedecked with bright feathers and tiny silver trinkets.

Thus stood the pirates of the Pecos.

All, for a moment, was still as death—a stillness that was ominous of death to those red braves.

Then, again rung the war-whoop of Black Wolf, who feared that the White foe would escape.

That whoop, which should have been echoed by the warriors, but which, at that instant, died on their lips—giving place, in some instances, to death-yells—had no sooner sounded, than six deadly tubes sent spurts of fire and smoke from the undergrowth, opposite the Apaches. A thunderous report again rung through the timber; and, as many braves as there had been shots, threw up their arms, and fell backward in death.

Then, before the dumfounded Apaches, whose fears, in regard to the presence of their foe in the thickets, had been banished by the prolonged silence, could recover themselves, the wild war-whoop of Black Wolf again sounded; the chief rushed forward, knowing that all was lost, if the warriors delayed.

But, as the arrows hurtled into the bushes and other deadly shafts were fitted to the strings, the spiteful and continuous crack of revolvers was heard; the bullets flying like hail amid the Apaches, as they rushed toward the ambush of their white foes.

Many braves fell before the deadly rifles and revolvers; but the survivors rushed toward the line of thickets, many falling over the dead. Then it was, that the war-whoop of the Waco was sounded in their rear; the bullets from Wild Wolf's revolver causing many a death-yell.

The frenzied Apaches rushed into the bushes, and were met by the Texans, in a hand-to-hand fight with knives; then, at the very moment when the lives of Big-Foot Wallace and his pards trembled in the balance, on, crashing through the undergrowth, dashed Captain Greene and Warnona; the latter shooting her revolver, and sounding the Waco war-cry—the former, with foaming lips, and insane glare, urging his frantic mustang directly into the ranks of the Apaches. Unearthly yells burst from his throat, as he slashed right and left, with the long, blood-reeking scalping-knife.

Wild Wolf, filled with pride at the conduct of his squaw, yet anxious for her safety, darted to her side, and fought madly; while Gerald, dripping with the waters of the Medina, joined the singular trio, and engaged in the deadly strife, although nearly exhausted by his recent exertions. But description is impossible.

At length, Black Wolf gave the retreat yell, and with his surviving braves, less than a score, rushed toward his camp; all, with bated breath, and terror-filled eyes, at the awful avalanche of death and disaster, that had come upon them.

"Come on, boyees, fer ther nags! Gerald and Wild Wolf, skute 'long o' us; fer hit won't do ter 'low ther red coyotes ter git a show ter breathe."

Thus yelled Big-Foot Wallace, and the survivors dashed after the giant scout.

Four of his brave pards were left, stark and stiff, with the corpses of the Apaches, and not one of our friends was free from knife-wounds, except Warnona.

The latter now urged her horse to a point on the river-bank, where the animal could descend, and forced him to swim the stream; finding poor Gracie where Gerald had left her, but nearly wild with anxiety in regard to the safety of her father and friends.

In a very few words, Warnona informed Dove Eye that White Chief was safe, and was seeking vengeance by the side of Hawk Eye, Wild Wolf and Big-Foot Wallace. Soon the two females crossed the river, and proceeded toward the camp.

Big-Foot, and the two scouts who had escaped death, together with Wild Wolf and Gerald, mounted their horses, which had been left in the little open, and dashed with Captain Greene, toward the Apache camp.

There they found the Waco squaw and Gracie.

The latter threw herself into the arms of her poor suffering father, who was unable, in any way, to give vent to his feelings.

"Thank God!" came from the lips of Gerald Granger, as he saw father and daughter thus folded in each other's arms. Then, at a yell from Big-Foot, he joined the remainder of the party; Warnona remaining with the old ranchero and Gracie.

"Dang my dogs, an' cuss my cats! Es Old Rocky 'ud sling hit," burst out the giant scout; "ther hull herd hev stampeded, an' ther reds air flat-footed, fur from hum, an' sufferin' from billiousness!

"Thar's no use ter foller 'em. They've tuck ter ther bush, an' air skutin' towards ther Pecos et a cyclone stampede.

"Wonder who run ther critters off?" This last was said, as the whites, with the Waco chief, returned to the tree.

"Warnona and White Chief stampede. Horses stampede. Mules stampede. Apache mustangs stampede. Waugh! It is good.

"Apache squaws sit in ashes two moons. Many death-yells on Rio Medina."

Wild Wolf gazed with pride upon his squaw, as he spoke, and added:

"Waugh! Warnona, Waco squaw, Wild Wolf's squaw. Heap brave. Good on war-path. Heap good. Waugh!"

Gerald sprung to the earth, and Gracie disengaged herself from her father, and threw herself, sobbing, upon his breast.

But, kind reader, as we near the end of our pen and paper trail, we would not tax your patience with a lengthy and detailed explanation of the future proceedings of our friends.

Big-Foot Wallace and his two pards buried the slain of their party. Then, as several rancheros arrived, eager for revenge, the giant scout led them on the trail; succeeding in slaying Black Wolf and nearly all his remaining followers.

Captain Greene, with his daughter and Warnona, returned to the devastated home on Cottonwood creek, and the bodies of their murdered ones received Christian burial.

Upon the return of Gerald Granger from the war-trail, he invited the captain and Gracie to his father's ranch; Wild Wolf and Warnona also accompanying the young scout to his home.

The rancheros met and rebuilt Greene's Ranch soon after, and, as the stolen herds were recovered, the estate remained much as formerly.

But Captain Greene was henceforth a broken-down man; sitting most of his time by the cluster of graves beneath the moss-draped branches of the timber. These hid forever from his view the wife and children who had been so brutally butchered before his eyes.

Gerald and Gracie were wedded a year after the startling events we have recorded—events which are true in every particular; the writer having oft listened to the recital of the same from the lips of Gerald Granger, the young scout. And not only from him, but from Grace Granger, nee Greene; at whose pleasant ranch one might often meet the faithful red friends of the Grangers—Warnona, and her warrior husband,

WILD WOLF, THE WACO.

THE END.

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